

Self-Realization Fellowship Lesson

"Thy Self-realization will blossom forth from thy soulful study"



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IN THE NIGHTLY GARDEN OF DREAMS

By Paramahansa Yogananda

In the nightly garden of my dreams grow many blossoms: the rarest flowers of my fancy. There, warmed by the astral dream-light, unopened buds of earthly hopes audaciously spread petals of fulfillment.

In the dream glow I spy specters of beloved forgotten faces; and sprites of dear, dead feelings, long buried in the soil of subconsciousness. All arise in shining robes. At the trumpet call of dream angels I behold the resurrection of all past experiences.

Lord, Thou hast given us freedom to forget our daily troubles by nightly visits to dreamland. May we escape from mortal sorrows forever by awakening in Thee.

--From "Whispers from Eternity"

PRAYER

O Creator of All! in the garden of Thy dreams let me be a radiant flower. Or may I be a tiny star, held on the timeless thread of Thy love as a twinkling bead in the vast necklace of Thy heavens.

Or give me the highest honor: the humblest place within Thy heart. There I would behold the creation of the noblest visions of life.

THE PHENOMENA OF DREAMS

Most people dream at night, but few take their jumbled dreams seriously. The greatest lesson dreamland has to offer is that we must not take our earthly experiences too seriously either, for they are nothing but a series of vast dream movies shown to us to entertain us. The Heavenly Father meant to entertain and educate us, His immortal children, with a variety of earthly movies. We must behold comedies, tragedies, and newsreels of life's movies with an entertained, joyous attitude, and learn from them without being overcome by their emotional impact.

In the dreamland we forget our names, bodies, nationalities, possessions, and our frailties. We unconsciously enjoy the great freedom that is native to the soul. We must cultivate a similar but conscious awareness of soul freedom; we must realize the truth that the soul is not permanently attached to its present bodily and world environment, sex, or race, but is omnipresent, eternal, free of any limitation.

God "froze" His thoughts into substance, and by maya or cosmic illusion He causes us to perceive His dream of the cosmos, with its various sensations, as tangible and real. It is maya that keeps us from realizing that the universe is constructed of mind stuff and that it has no more reality than do our dreams, which we recognize, upon awakening from them, as creations of our own minds.

God has given the soul and mind the power to materialize thoughts in the dreamland; to create, in the same way that He does, a miniature cosmos. The phenomena of dreams show that we employ the instrument of the mind to reproduce an exact and realistic copy of this world and of the experiences of mundane life. God is showing us, in our dreams, that we, being His children, can create substance out of thought, even as He does.

In the dreamland the soul becomes free to create a cosmos after its own fancy. It can move in a new body, in a new world; enjoy ice cream or hot tea; live in the hot Sahara desert or in the bleak regions of Alaska, or in the heights of the Himalayas. In dreamland the soul can masquerade as a poor man or a king; it can satisfy all its unfulfilled earthly desires by materializing them into dream experiences. Here the

soul can create, if it will, a perfect world, free from poverty, sickness, wickedness, and ignorance. Here it can be a part of anything it thinks it cannot be in its earthly life. Here the soul can perceive the birth of a baby or the death of a man. Here it can cry or smile, hear songs, smell flowers, touch, feel, think, reason, meditate, and perform every activity, even as it does in this earthly life.

Just as we find this variety-filled dream life interesting, without believing in its actuality, so we must prove ourselves to be God's immortal children, who can learn from and be entertained by the cosmic movies, without forgetting that they are temporary and delusive. We must prove ourselves to be true sons of God by appreciating the lessons of the cosmic movies without losing the unchangeable joyous poise of our inner beings--our souls--which are true reflections of immortal, unchangeable God.

**SIGNIFICANCE
OF DREAMS** All dreams have some significance even though all dreams are not true. For even "meaningless" dreams are reflections of disordered, purposeless thinking.

In fact, all dreams signify the state of one's consciousness. The worldly man has worldly dreams. The active man has dreams of activity. The evil man has dreams of evil. Imaginative people have fanciful dreams. Matter-of-fact people have dreams of daily activities. The person who is filled with worry and fear has nightmares--which should warn him to change his attitude lest he attract the objects of his worry or fear, not only through his conscious thoughts, but also through the powerful vibrations of his subconscious thoughts. The one whose thoughts dwell too much on sexual matters has dreams of sex, which signify that he must make conscious effort to dislodge these acquired conscious and subconscious sex impulses from the conscious and subconscious minds. Subconscious optimism brings forth comedy dreams. Subconscious pessimism turns out tragedy dream films. Do not try to decipher the meaning of every dream--just remember that it probably symbolizes your mental or physical state; hence you must adjust your waking thought and actions if you would clarify or improve your dreams.

You may ask: "What about prophetic and warning dreams? Many people have had true dreams and visions." This subject, as well as the meaning of some dream symbols that show one's state of spiritual development, will be dealt with at greater length in Step 2 of the SRF Lessons.

**DREAM ON THE LAP
OF IMMORTALITY** If you have faith in your relationship with the Infinite, through contact in deep meditation, you will know that whether or not nature shatters your body, you are still on the lap of that Infinite Assurance. Resurrect yourself from the consciousness of useless human habits and changing human thoughts. Live every second in the consciousness that you are immortal; thoughts and habits change, only your soul will live forever. This is not said to frighten you, but to quicken your understanding, to quicken your efforts, so that you will not keep the ever new bliss of your soul buried under temporary false satisfactions.

We have no real existence as creatures made of matter. The body you

see is nothing but materialized electricity. How can electricity be sick? It is a delusion of this dream world, but simply saying that it is a delusion is not enough. If, in a dream, you see a wall and you see your head strike the wall, you will have a broken skull...in your dream. Self-Realization Fellowship teaches that it is only by coming in contact with God that one sees that the universe and the body are nothing but condensed electricity, thoughts or vibrations of God "frozen" into various forms. Science has said that electricity is nothing but energy. That energy is frozen Cosmic Consciousness. We must not call it simply "Mind"; that term is too limited in its connotations. It is Cosmic Consciousness that makes us sense different things; which enables us to have consciousness of matter as well as consciousness of Spirit.

Resurrect your soul from dreams of frailties. Resurrect your soul in eternal wisdom. What is the method? It includes many things: relaxation, self-control, right diet, fortitude, an undaunted attitude of mind, regular meditation with practice of scientific concentration and meditation principles. You may fail at first, but do not acknowledge defeat. To acknowledge defeat is greater defeat. You have unlimited power; you must cultivate that great power.

Meditation is the greatest way of resurrecting your soul from the bondage of the body and from all your trials. Meditate at the feet of the Infinite. Learn to saturate yourself with Him. Your trials may be heavy, may be great, but the greatest enemy of yourself is yourself. You are immortal; your trials are mortal. They are changeable; you are unchangeable. You can unleash infinite powers and shatter your finite trials. Resurrect yourself from weakness, ignorance, consciousness of disease, and above all, from the clutches of undesirable habits that beset your life.

Neither the dream of life nor the dream of death is lasting. Your last sleep in this body will be dreamless; nightmares and your beautiful dreams of earthly life will bid farewell, at least for a time. Then, after a short rest on the downy bed of blissful oblivion, you will wake up in another dream of another life, in a new earthly setting, or even on another planet. Then again you will be deluded into thinking that you are awake when you are still dreaming. Alas, this delusive sleeping and waking in dreams will continue until man knows that he can really awaken only in God.

As in our dreaming we divide our minds into thoughts of many things, such as minds, mountains, souls, sky, and stars, and make every picture out of the tissue of fancy, so God has created in His dreaming mind a star-checkered savanna of the blue, a planetary family which includes the earth and its creatures, laughing, crying, living, dying.

May God make us fearless by letting us know that we are waking and dreaming in Him, and that we are His all-protected, ever happy Self. Let us unite our evanescent lives with His imperishable Life. Let us blend our flickering happiness, which stales so quickly, into His enduring, ever new Bliss.

THOUGHTS TO REMEMBER

Dreams can be consciously induced by relaxing and visualizing while looking intently at the point between the eyebrows. Perhaps you do not know that there is anything beyond the state of darkness. You can never believe unless you have experienced it yourself.

Do not be discouraged if a dream does not come for a long time, for it will finally come if you persist. Sometimes you dream things that later you do not recall. The reason one does not remember dreams is that the process of awakening withdraws the life energy from the subconscious mind, where the dream has been going on, and employs the life energy to vivify only the waking consciousness of the brain.

Many students on the spiritual path, striving to go from the conscious to the superconscious state, become sidetracked in the subconscious. They get caught in the movieland of dreams, and become satisfied. As you take your attention away from the motion picture of sensory experiences, do not lose yourself in the movieland of dreams. Pass by and race toward the Infinite Spirit.

THE MOUSE THAT BECAME A TIGER

The holy city of Banaras in India is encompassed by a dark forest inhabited by wild animals. In the depths of this deep jungle was a beautiful hermitage in which lived a God-knowing saint. This holy man, who possessed great wisdom and many miraculous powers, had no one near to him in this world except a little pet mouse.

Many pilgrims and disciples braved the dangers of ferocious tigers and other wild beasts of the forest in order to visit the great master, bringing with them offerings of fruits and flowers. (A disciple never goes empty-handed to his master, who, as God's agent, gives him priceless spiritual treasures.) Everyone who came to visit the saint marveled at the great friendship between him and the mouse, and enjoyed throwing tidbits to his pet.

One day while a group of students was visiting the great master in his secluded hermitage, the mouse, chased by a cat, ran squeaking to the feet of the sage for protection. Before the wondering gaze of his students, the saint changed the little trembling mouse into a huge, ferocious cat! The metamorphosed mouse henceforth went fearlessly in the company of cats without being molested, and was quite happy in its new form except when one of the disciples "who knew him when" would refer to him as the saint's "glorified mouse-cat."

Sometime later the same group of students was visiting the master again when the mouse-cat was pursued by wild jungle dogs. Meowing loudly, it came at top speed to the feet of the sage who exclaimed: "Be thou a wild dog." The astonished students saw the mouse-cat change

into a dog before their eyes. And great was the bewilderment of the wild dogs, who made a disappointed retirement. The mouse-dog eventually became better acquainted and even friendly with other wild dogs, playing and eating with them with a scornful sense of superiority to lesser creatures.

On another occasion, students who had seen the two preceding miracles were studying with the master. In the midst of the lesson they were dismayed to see a full-grown Royal Bengal tiger chasing the mouse-dog, who was racing as usual for shelter at the feet of the sage. But the master, once again using his miraculous powers, stopped the tiger in his tracks. Speaking to his pet, the saint said: "Mr. Mouse, it is foolish for me to go on constantly having to protect you from your enemies. Henceforth, be thou a tiger." The students, once they had recovered from their first fear, began to laugh and exclaim, "Look at the saint's fierce tiger! He is only a glorified mouse."

As time went by and visitors to the hermitage found out that the fearsome tiger patrolling the place was only a mouse uplifted to tiger-hood through one of the saint's miracles, they frequently made disparaging remarks about the mouse-tiger. Newcomers would be told by older disciples, "Don't be nervous. That is not really a tiger. It is only a mouse glorified into a tiger by the Master."

The mouse that had become a tiger tired of this popular affront and he thought: "If only I could kill the saint, then the cause of my discomfiture would be removed." Thinking this, the mouse-tiger sprang to kill the sage. Instantly perceiving the motive of his ungrateful pet, the sage loudly commanded: "Be thou a mouse again!" and lo, the roaring tiger became once more a squeaking mouse.

Dear friend, never forget that by using God-given power you may change yourself from a little human mouse, squeaking with failure and fear, into a brave tiger of material, mental, and spiritual success. But do not forget also that if you become antagonistic to that power you may change again from a tiger of success to a miserable mouse of failure. Concentrate well on the duties you are performing, but always, in the background of your mind, hum a silent devotional song of love to your beloved Heavenly Father, remembering that all your abilities are gifts from Him.

AFFIRMATION

My dreams of perfection are bridges that carry me into the realm of pure ideas.

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THE DIVINE GYPSY

By Paramahansa Yogananda

I will be a gypsy--
Roam, roam, and roam.
I will sing a song that none has sung!
I will sing to the sky,
I will sing to the winds,
I'll sing to my red clouds!
I'll roam, roam, and roam--
King of the lands through which I roam.

By day, the shady trees will be my tent,
At night, the stars shall be
My candles, twinkling in the firmament;
And I will call the moon to be my lamp
And light my silver, skyey camp.
I will be a gypsy--
Roam, roam, and roam.

I will eat the food that chance may bring;
I will drink from crystal sparkling spring;
I will doff my cap and off will go,
Like a wayward brook of long ago;
I will roll o'er the green
And scatter the joy of all my heart
To birds, leaves, winds, hills--then depart
To stranger and stranger lands, from East to West.
Oh! I will be a gypsy--
Roam, roam, and roam!

But always, when I lay me down to rest,
I'll sing to Thee my gypsy prayer,
And find Thee, always, everywhere.

PRAYER

O Divine Mother, I often heard Thy gentle voice saying: "Come home," but it was drowned in the noises of the wild cravings of many lives. Now I have forsaken the jostling crowds of desires. In the solitude of my mind, my devotion is bursting to hear Thy voice again.

PLAIN LIVING AND GOD-THINKING

Do you realize how you spend your life? Very few of us know how much we can put into life if we use it properly, wisely, and economically. First, let us economize our time--lifetimes ebb away before we wake up, and that is why we do not realize the value of the immortal time God has given us. Too much time is spent in rushing, in getting nowhere. Very few of us stop, think, and try to find out what life can give us. Most people do not think at all--they just eat, sleep, and die.

It is important to differentiate between your needs and your wants. Your needs are few, while your wants can be limitless. In order to find freedom and Bliss, minister only to your needs. Stop creating limitless wants and pursuing the will-o'-the-wisp of false happiness. The more you depend upon conditions outside yourself for happiness, the less happiness you will experience.

Fostering desire for luxuries is a sure way to increase misery. Do not be a slave of things or possessions. Boil down even your needs to a minimum. Spend your time in search of lasting happiness or Bliss. The unchangeable, immortal soul is hidden behind the screen of your consciousness, on which are painted at various times dark pictures of disease, failure, death, and so forth. Lift the veil of illusive change and be established in your immortal nature. Enthrone your fickle consciousness on the changelessness and calmness within you, which is the throne of God; then let your soul manifest Bliss night and day.

Happiness can be secured by the exercise of self-control, by cultivating habits of plain living and high thinking, and by spending less money, even though earning more than enough to provide for extra things. Make an effort to earn more so that you can be the means of helping others to help themselves: there is an unwritten law that he who helps others to abundance and happiness always will be helped in return, and he will become more and more prosperous and happy. This is an infallible law of happiness. Is it not better to live simply and to grow really rich--in Spirit?

TRUE DESIRELESSNESS The soul's nature is Bliss, a lasting inner state of ever new, ever changing joy that eternally bestows Bliss that does not fade. One who has been made blissful by this joy of the soul, finds that the Bliss endures, even when he is passing through trials of physical suffering or death. Desirelessness is not a negation of joy, but the finding of fulfillment of all desires

in the all-satisfying joy of God.

You must attain self-control in order to regain the eternal heritage of all-fulfillment lying within your soul. First, by meditation, give your soul the opportunity to manifest Bliss, and then, constantly living in this state, do your duty to your body and mind and the world. You need not give up your ambitions and become negative; on the contrary, let the everlasting joy, which is your real nature, help you to realize all your noble ambitions. Enjoy noble experiences with the joy of God. Perform real duties with divine joy.

You are immortal and are endowed with eternal joy. Never forget this during your play with changeable mortal life. This world is but a stage on which you play your parts under the direction of the Divine Stage Manager. Play them well, whether they are tragic or comic, always remembering that your real nature is eternal Bliss, and nothing else. The one thing that will never leave you, once you transcend all unstable mental states, is the joy of your soul.

WHAT IS GOD? The usual conception of God is that He is superhuman, infinite, omnipresent, and omniscient; but in this general conception there are many variations. Whatever conception we have of God, if it does not influence our daily conduct, if our everyday life does not find an inspiration from it, and if it is not found to be universally necessary, then that conception is useless. If God is not conceived in such a way that we cannot do without Him in the satisfaction of a want, in our dealings with people, when earning money, in reading a book, in passing an examination, in the doing of the most trifling or the highest duties, then it is plain that we have not felt any connection between God and life. God may be infinite, omnipresent, omniscient, personal, and merciful, but these conceptions are not sufficiently compelling to make us try to know God. We have no immediate and practical use for those conceptions in our busy lives.

We read about God in the various scriptures. We hear of His presence and listen to His praise in the sermons of religious men and saints. We imagine Him behind the veils of the beauty of nature. We think about His existence through the logic within us. But all of these windows, through which we try to see God, are fitted with an opaque glass of uncertain inference drawn from untested, unscrutinized data.

We cannot have full or direct knowledge of God through the limited powers of the intellect, which give only a partial and indirect view of things. To view a thing intellectually is to view it by being apart from it. Intuition is the direct grasp of truth, seeing it by being one with it. It is by intuition that God consciousness is realized. God is Bliss. He is ever existent. When we wish for eternal Bliss, or God, we also wish for eternal, immortal, unchangeable, ever conscious existence.

It must be remembered that to seek God does not give us any excuse to neglect the various physical, mental, and spiritual battles of life. On the other hand, the climbing spiritual aspirant must learn to conquer moods, habits, desires, and so on, in order to free the temple of life

from the darkness of ignorance and the weakness of disease, so that God's perfect presence may be perceived. As a houseful of jewels cannot be seen in the dark, so the presence of God cannot be perceived while the darkness of ignorance, overpowering disease, or mental inharmony prevails.

HOW TO KNOW GOD To know God is to love Him. Knowledge of God precedes the ability to love Him. At least, we must have some little conception of what He really is. We are told "He is love," but we know only human love; how then can we conceive that wondrous divine love that makes all mankind free? Wood, stones, animals--all things are but different manifestations of God with varying rates of vibration. Our own feelings may be an expression of God, but they are not God. The wave may be a manifestation of the ocean, but the wave cannot be called the ocean. Is electricity God? No, for we cannot switch Him on or off. He is ever burning Cosmic Spirit.

Do you really know the Supreme Being? Have you seen Him? Some people say: "He dwells in everything," others say: "He is omnipresent." Yet space alone is not God.

When my Master asked me: "What is God?" I said: "God is Spirit." When he asked: "What is Spirit?" I answered: "Spirit is Infinite Intelligence." "Yes," he said, "but Infinite Intelligence is God, so you see you are talking and reasoning in circles, and in that way you will never get anywhere." Substituting different names for God does not define Him. Similarly, the Bible says: "The Word was God." But, what is the Word?

In the same way, when you are asked to define water, you may say: "It is H₂O, or aqua, or rain, or ice," and try to define it that way. If you really know what God is, then you can define Him satisfactorily to a new inquirer, but when you try to analyze or define God without knowing Him, you only give your ideas about God. What is God? That was one of the questions I thought I was sure of until I found that I could not make a satisfactory explanation. But from my Master's explanation I really learned about God, and found Him for myself. God has been a reality to me ever since.

FORCE AND
CONTROLLING
INTELLIGENCE There are two elemental factors in this universe: first, force, and second intelligence, controlling that force. You cannot mention any one thing that does not have intelligence. The human body is simply a combination of elements that can be found almost anywhere in nature's realm. Unless intelligence is in it, it is only a combination of these elements, and nothing more. With intelligence added, it becomes a live and thinking being. Can intelligence come out of nothing? Is it not reasonable to suppose that somewhere there is some sort of factory that produces that intelligence? We humans are only one of the many products of that factory of Cosmic Intelligence.

God is that invisible factory of intelligence that creates, gives birth to, and harmoniously develops all manifested things.

Why do the seasons come on time? Why do we have hunger in the body and food sources on this earth to satisfy that hunger? If there were no Cosmic Intelligence, we might have hunger but no food. Throughout the universe--in spite of the many mischievous pranks of nature--there always seems to be a rhythm, and all things are products of the one factory of the One All-Ruling Intelligence. But even when we say this, still we do not define that Intelligence. Here is the explanation:

God is that Supreme Intelligence which governs everything!

Some people do not realize that there is a difference between force and intelligence. Electricity is a force, but unless we put it into a lamp, it cannot give a light that can be used. Intelligence puts it into the lamp. All the forces of nature cannot satisfactorily work by themselves without the guidance of intelligence. The Cosmic Factory of Intelligence works in a coordinated way. Steam has power to make things move and fire converts water into steam. These are only two of nature's forces, but they, of themselves, in their unharnessed natural state, do not accomplish anything importantly useful; but when harnessed by intelligence, and directed rightly, they can be made of great service to mankind. The earth and the whole universe seemingly have been placed on a routine so that human life is made possible. This cosmic schedule, "The rhythm of the spheres," is the product of Divine Intelligence.

The surest sign that God exists is the increasing heart-bursting joy felt in meditation. When your mind is free from prejudice; when narrow-mindedness vanishes; when you unreservedly sympathize with everyone; when you hear the voice of God in the chorus of churches, temples, tabernacles, and mosques; when you realize that life is a joyous battle of duty but at the same time only a passing dream; and above all, when you become increasingly intoxicated with the joy of meditation, and in making others happy by bestowing on them your divine peace--then you will know that God is with you always and that you are in Him.

THOUGHTS TO REMEMBER

Let us live simply outside, and be supremely happy within. Let us learn to build inner mansions of wisdom in the unfading garden of peace that blooms with the million-hued blossoms of beautiful soul qualities.

Let us "get rich quick" by acquiring the incomparable wealth of soul-peace, and become peace-millionaires. Let us live in our Self-created paradise, which lies buried in our fancy; and let us bring the living God of pure joy onto the altar of our hearts and worship Him there with flowers of deathless devotion.

Let us learn to love God as the joy felt in meditation. Let us choose only good paths of action on which we can race to the goal of Self-realization. Let us think of God as we travel on our life's path and finish all progressive actions.

Let us ask God to be with us when we, by our own will, choose good actions. We should think of God before we eat body-nourishing food; we should think of Him while we are eating it. Then when we are finished eating, we should think of God.

We should change our center of consciousness from material desires to a desire for God. We should ask God to make our peace, silence, joy and meditation His altars, where our souls may meet and commune with Him in the Holy of Holies.

Let our prayer be: make my understanding the temple of Thy guidance.

THE DISCONTENTED MAN--Part 1

Once there was a devout, rich bachelor, by the name of John, who thought he was free and happy in every way except for his indigestion. He tried everything, but his money could not buy a remedy for his chronic ailment. At the age of seventy, when John lay dying from an attack of acute indigestion, he inwardly prayed: "Lord God, if I am to be born again, I shall be a happy man in my next life if I am given a strong, healthy body free from indigestion. I shall not care then whether I have riches or not."

An angel of God appeared in a vision while John was dying, and whispered: "In thy next incarnation thy prayer shall be granted according to the sovereign command of the Most High."

When John reincarnated, he was born in a very poor family. From infancy his body was as strong as a Sandow's. The early death of his parents added to the acuteness of his poverty. John's "inheritance" was a strong body with a gnawing hunger; he did not have enough money to buy sufficient food to appease its demands. However, according to the latent wishes of his past incarnation, John often thought to himself: "Lord, I am thankful to have a diseaseless, strong body; it doesn't matter that I have so little money." Years passed, but no matter what he did, he was never able to provide adequate sustenance for his husky body.

At last, as John lay dying of starvation, he prayed: "Lord, I have had enough of muscles! What use are they if I have no money to buy food to keep them strong? Lord, if I must be born again, please give me money and health and I shall be happy."

The angel of the Lord again granted John's wishes, and in his third incarnation he was born a wealthy, strong-bodied man. As the years passed, he often said to himself: "I have everything; I am happy." But later began to add: "Just the same, I feel that health and money are useless without someone to share them with." So as he lay dying of old age, brokenheartedly he prayed: "Lord, if I must be born again, do not make life so miserably lonely, but in addition to health and wealth give me a wife."

The angel of the Lord, as usual, granted the wish of this devout, law-abiding man. In the fourth incarnation he was born rich, very healthy, and in due time came to marry a handsome but nagging, jealous wife. Our friend passed his life virtually her prisoner. As he again lay dying, from age and nervous debility caused by the constant nagging of his jealous wife, John prayed: "Lord, in the next life I want, in addition to prosperity and health, only a good wife."

The angel of the Lord again granted John's wish; in the fifth incarnation he was born healthy and wealthy, and finally came to wed a good, faithful, meek wife, who agreed with him in everything. After two years, at the acme of matrimonial happiness, his beloved wife died. John was grief-stricken and passed his life like a monk, constantly worshiping the gloves, shoes, and other possessions of his lost good wife.

(To be continued)

AFFIRMATION

I will make a bonfire of all my desires for material possessions and burn them in the one great ever-increasing flame of desire that seeks only to know Thee.



Self-Realization Fellowship

Founded in 1920 by Paramahansa Yogananda

Dear Self-Realization Student:

Paramahansa Yogananda often spoke to students of his teachings about the value of reinforcing their personal spiritual efforts with group practice of meditation. The united effort of a group infuses spiritual strength into the individual participants, helping them to deepen their private meditations at home and to meet the daily challenges of life with greater calmness and insight.

Self-Realization Fellowship meditation groups, established in accordance with Paramahansaji's guidance, give Lessons students around the world the opportunity to meet regularly for group meditation and inspirational services. Meetings of SRF meditation groups also include special prayer services for all who have requested help and for greater peace and harmony in the world. These services are described in the booklet sent to you recently about our Worldwide Prayer Circle.

After participating for some time in a meditation group, one member wrote to the Mother Center: "Studying the SRF Lessons and meditating alone is quite different from having an opportunity to practice the techniques and to meditate in company with other devotees. I have seen through my own experience the great spiritual value of group effort."

If you are interested in getting together with other Self-Realization members for group meditation, you are welcome to write or telephone the Mother Center. We will be happy to let you know if there is an SRF meditation group in your area and to give you information about contacting them in regard to the times and place of their meetings.

As you continue with your study and practice of the Self-Realization teachings, may God fill your life with His blessings, and may you find in Him a freedom and joy that answers the deepest longings of your soul.

In divine friendship,

Center Department

SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP
Center Department

Self-Realization Fellowship Lesson

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DIVINE LOVE

By Paramahansa Yogananda

O Love, thou art the mystic echo from the caverns of heart,
And the inaudible voice of feeling.
Thou art the unseen charmer of souls.
Thou art the fountain flowing from the bosom of friendship.
Thou art the Divine Cupid, enticing mystic souls
To pierce the heart of all living things.
Thou art the silent language of souls,
And the invisible ink that lovers use
To write letters on the pages of their hearts.
Thou art the mother of all affections,
And in Thy breast throbs the heart of God.
Love is the silent conversation between two hearts,
And it is the call of God to all creatures,
Animate and inanimate,
To return to His house of Oneness.
Love is the heartbeat of all life,
And the angel of incarnation.
Love is born in the garden of soul progress,
And it sleeps behind the darkness of outer attachments.
It is the oldest and the sweetest nectar,
Preserved in the bottles of hearts.
Love is the light that dissolves all walls
Between souls, families, and nations.
Love is the unfading blossom of pure friendship
In the garden of both young and mature souls.
Love is the door to heaven, the completed songs of souls.

PRAYER

I come to Thee with the song of my smiles.
Whatever treasures lie in the secret safe of my
soul, I have brought eagerly to Thee. I have
brought all the honey from the hive of my
heart. Whatsoever is mine, that also is Thine.
The taper of my happiness will merge with Thy
blaze of Bliss.

CONTROL OF YOUR EMOTIONS IS THE KEY TO HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

The teaching presented in the SRF Lessons is a comprehensive system--a method to bring the individual into complete and balanced harmony with the great plan of the universe. There are many forces at work seeking to destroy this balance, to produce disease, fear, poverty, failure, and unhappiness. These forces attack the individual to upset his physical, mental, and spiritual balance. The great secret of mastering these forces was known for ages by the great Hindu saints, and it enabled them to live far beyond the usual term of life in perfect youthfulness of body and mind, and in perfect spiritual harmony.

There are only two ways to travel in life: one leads to happiness and the other to sorrow. There is no mystery about it; it is very simple in spite of its apparent complexities. You should look at life unmasked, in the mirror of your experiences. View time and space as they come to you in the form of problems, experiences, and relations. Look at the perpetual current of emotions and thoughts that arise within you. Go into the heart of your aspirations, dreams, hopes, and despairs. Dive deep into the mute cravings of your inner self. Life is manifesting itself through all these channels and demanding that you seek understanding with your highest intelligence, wisdom, love, and vision.

Sorrow has no being of its own. It has no objective existence, but arises rather in the subjective nature of the sufferer. Constantly you affirm sorrow, therefore it exists. Deny it in your mind and it will exist no longer. This assertion of the Self is what I call the hero in man. It is his divine or essential nature. In order to acquire freedom from sorrow, man must assert his heroic self in all his daily activities. Sorrow is not necessary for the progressive march of life, although the birth of joy seemingly comes out of pain.

In our relative existence it is evident that the conditions and circumstances surrounding life are conducive either to sorrow or to happiness, as if in their very nature they were either desirable or undesirable. The root of sorrow lies in the dearth of heroism and courage in the character of the average man. When the heroic element is lacking in the mental makeup of a person, his mind becomes susceptible to the threat of all passing sorrows. Mental conquest brings happiness into life, but sorrow arises out of mental defeat. As long as the conqueror in man is

awake, no sorrow can cast its shadow over the threshold of his heart.

RISE ABOVE
CIRCUMSTANCES

Tears and sighs on the battlefield of life are the liquid cowardice of weak minds. Those who give up the fight become prisoners within the walls of their own ignorance. Life is worth nothing if it is not a continuous overcoming of problems. Each problem that waits for a solution at your hand is a religious duty imposed upon you by life itself. Any escape from problems, physical or mental, is an escape from life, as there can be no life that is not full of problems. Essentially, conditions are neither good nor bad; they are always neutral, seeming to be either depressing or encouraging because of the sad or bright attitude of the mind of the individual concerned with them. When a person mentally sinks below the level of circumstances, he surrenders himself to the influence of bad times, ill luck, and sorrow. If he rises above circumstances by the heroic courage that is in him, all conditions of life, however dark and threatening, will be like a blanket of mist that will disappear with the warm glance of the sun. The sorrows of the ordinary person do not arise out of the conditions of life; they are not inherent in the conditions. They are born out of the weaknesses and infirmities of the human mind and the effects of human experiences. Awaken the victor in yourself, arouse the sleeping hero in yourself, and lo! no sorrow will ever again overwhelm you.

Ignorant people, like some animals, do not heed the lessons that accompany pain and pleasure. Most people live a life checkered with sadness and sorrow. They do not avoid the actions that lead to suffering, and do not follow the ways that lead to happiness. Then there are people who are oversensitive to sorrow and happiness. Such persons are usually extremely crushed by sorrow and overwhelmed by joy, thus losing their mental balance. There are very few people who, even after burning their fingers in the fire of ignorance, learn to avoid misery-making acts. People wish to be happy, and yet most of them never make the effort to adopt the course of action that leads to happiness. Lacking imagination, they keep rolling down the hill of life, only mentally wishing to climb the peak of happiness, until something terrible happens to arouse them from their nightmare of folly. Usually it is only then, if their enthusiasm for happiness survives the crash to the bottom of unhappiness, that they wake up.

DO NOT POISON
PEACE BY ANGER

Anger defeats the very purpose for which it is aroused. Anger is not an antidote for anger. A strong wrath may cause another to suppress his weaker wrath, but it will never kill that weaker wrath. When you are angry, say nothing. Knowing it is a disease, like the coming of a cold, break it up by mental warm baths consisting of thinking of those with whom you can never be angry, no matter how they behave. If your emotion is too violent, take a cold shower, or put a piece of ice on the medulla oblongata and the temples just above the ears, and on the forehead, especially between the eyebrows, and on the top of the head.

Anger gives birth to jealousy, hatred, spite, revengefulness, destructive instinct, wild ideas, brain paralysis, and temporary insanity--

any of which may lead to horrible crimes. It is poison to peace and calmness. It is poison to understanding. Anger is a manner of misunderstanding. To conquer others by anger is the method of fools, for anger only rouses more wrath in the enemy and thus makes him a stronger and more powerful opponent. A righteous demonstration of anger to avert evil without causing harm is sometimes productive of good. Blind, uncontrolled anger is revengeful, spiteful; it only increases the evil that you wish to destroy. Be indifferent to those who seem to enjoy making you angry.

When anger comes, set your machinery of calmness in motion to manufacture the antidotes of peace, love, and forgiveness which banish anger. Think of love, and reflect that even as you do not want others to be angry with you, neither do you wish others to feel your ugly anger. When you become Christ-like and look upon all humanity as little brothers hurting one another ("for they know not what they do"), you cannot feel angry with anyone. Ignorance is the mother of all anger.

Develop metaphysical reason and destroy anger. Look upon the anger-arousing agent as a child of God; think of him as a little five-year-old baby brother who perhaps has unwittingly stabbed you. You should not feel a desire to stab this little brother in return. Mentally destroy anger by saying: "I will not poison my peace with anger; I will not disturb my habitual joy-giving calmness with wrath."

OVERCOMING FEAR Secret fear creates tension and anxiety, and brings ultimate collapse. We must have faith in our ability, and hope in the triumph of a righteous cause. If we do not possess these qualities, we must create them in our own minds through concentration. This can be accomplished by determined and long-continued practice. Fortunately, we can start practicing any time and any place, concentrating upon developing those good qualities in which we are defective. If we are lacking in will power, let us concentrate upon that, and through conscious effort we shall be able to create strong will power in ourselves. If we want to relieve ourselves of fear, we should meditate upon courage, and in due time we shall be freed from the bondage of fear. Through concentration and meditation we make ourselves powerful. This new power enables us to focus our attention upon one point at a time, and continual practice for an extended period will enable us to concentrate our energy upon a single problem or a single responsibility without any effort. It will become second nature to us. Possessed with this new quality, we shall succeed in our life's undertakings, whether spiritual or material.

As soon as the soldiers of wrong thoughts rally to attack your inner peace, it is time to wake up the soul soldiers of light, honesty, self-control, and desire for good things, and to wage furious battle. It rests with you whether you want greed, sense slavery, anger, hatred, revengefulness, worries, or inharmonies to rule your life, or whether you will let the divine soldiers of self-control, calmness, love, forgiveness, peace, and harmony govern your mental kingdom. Drive away those rebel sense habits that have brought misery to the empire of your peace. Be king over yourself, letting the soldiers of goodness and good habits

rule the kingdom of your mind. Then happiness will reign within you forever.

You must possess courage, faith, and hope. Courage is needed to fight against dreaded fear. We have said before that fear destroys life. There are many people who will not even attempt to work because they are desperately afraid of not succeeding. They feel that they are not competent enough to do the work, and thus meet failure even before starting. The Bhagavad Gita describes how Arjuna, at first overwhelmed with fear of losing courage on the battlefield, braces up and performs his sacred duty.

Always know that every day is a fresh opportunity on the part of the human ego to perform more and more exploits of heroism. Meet everybody and every circumstance on the battlefield of life with the courage of a hero and the smile of a conqueror. Whatever comes your way and needs attention must be considered as a duty. Duty is not imposed upon man by some superior power. It is the inherent urge of life toward progression; therefore, duty is action that needs care. Neglect of duty is a source of evil that can be avoided by wisdom.

ALL IS IN GOD Avoid associating with those who are always complaining about life. They may ruin your newly awakened spirituality, which is like a tender plant growing within you. Avoid such people and try to be always happy, no matter how you are situated. God will never reveal Himself to you unless you are contented and happy. You must saturate everything with the thought of God. Realize that all that exists is centered in God.

Be silent and calm every night for at least half an hour, preferably much longer, before you retire, and again in the morning before starting the day's activity. This will produce an undaunted, unbreakable inner habit of happiness that will make you able to meet all the trying situations of the everyday battle of life. With that unchangeable happiness within, go about seeking to fulfill the demands of your daily needs. Seek happiness more and more in your mind, and less and less in the desire to acquire things. Be so happy in your mind that nothing that comes can possibly make you unhappy. Then you can get along without things that you have been accustomed to. Be happy because you know that you have acquired the power not to be negative, and because you know, too, that you can acquire at will whatever you need, and that you will never again become so material-minded that you will forget your inner happiness, even though you should become a millionaire.

THOUGHTS TO LIVE BY

Unselfishness draws everybody, including one's own self, into the circle of brotherhood. It brings many harvests--return service from others, self-expansion, divine sympathy, lasting happiness, and Self-realization.

Feeling the sorrows of others in order to help free them from fur-

ther suffering, seeking happiness in the joy of others, and constantly trying to satisfy the needs of bigger and bigger groups of people, is what you might call being "sacredly selfish." The man of sacred selfishness counts all his earthly losses as deliberately brought about by himself for the good of others, and for his own great and ultimate gain. He lives to love his brethren, for he knows that they are all the children of the One God. His entire selfishness is sacred for whenever he thinks, not of the small body and mind of ordinary understanding, but of the needs of all bodies and minds within the range of his acquaintance or influence, his self then becomes one with the Self of all. He becomes the mind and feelings of all creatures. So when he does anything for himself, he can only do that which is good for all. He who considers himself as one whose body and limbs consist of all humanity and all creatures, he is the one who certainly finds the universal, all-pervading Spirit in himself.

* * *

THE DISCONTENTED MAN--Part 2

Finally, having reached a ripe old age, our friend John lay dying and he prayed: "Lord, if I have to be born on earth again, do grant me, in addition to health and wealth, a long-lived good wife." An angel of the Lord appeared in a vision and answered: "Your prayer will be granted."

In his sixth incarnation John was not only wealthy and healthy, but he had a long-lived good wife. They celebrated their silver wedding anniversary in happiness. One day John's male secretary died; John decided to engage a pretty nineteen-year-old girl secretary.

John became madly infatuated with his new employee. He thought: "My good wife must not know about this. I love her with all my heart, and I would never dream of divorcing her; but alas, she has grown old and homely, and the face of my young secretary is beautiful and fresh as a lily." Infatuation got the upper hand. Eventually he did divorce his wife in order to marry the young girl. His new bride lived with John until she had secured most of his fortune; then she left him for a younger man.

Broken in spirit, John prayed in deep meditation for a vision of the Lord, who obliged him by appearing in a majestic form enveloped in golden light. The Lord said: "John, at the end of the first incarnation in which you had found your way to Me by prayer, you asked to be cured of indigestion; so in the next incarnation I granted you a strong body, but not the wealth that you had enjoyed in the previous life. You soon tired of health without the money to buy plenty of food, so in the following incarnation I gave you both health and wealth. Then, lonely, you prayed for a wife.

"The fourth incarnation brought you health, riches, and a wife; but she nagged you, and so you prayed for a good wife next time. In the fifth incarnation I granted you a good wife, and wealth, and health; but

after two years of marriage your good wife died. Then you said you would be happy if you could only have a good long-lived wife in addition to health and plenty of money. But what a nest of trouble you have made for yourself, trying by these different ways to make yourself happy in this delusion-ridden earth of Mine! Now tell Me, what do you want next?"

John reverently answered: "Lord, I want nothing but constant awareness of Thee! It doesn't matter whether I am rich or poor, healthy or unhealthy, married or single, on earth or in heaven, so long as Thou dost teach me Thy way to be happy everywhere Thou dost place me, in any circumstance of life. Henceforth I will use my own free will to do Thy will alone."

God replied: "My son, your answer pleases Me. This earth is but a movie house to which I send all My immortal children to be entertained and to entertain, to play in ever-changing dramas of life with a blissful attitude of divine detachment. It grieves Me to find that most of My children forget that the tragedies and comedies of life are only My unreal dream-plays; thus they tarnish their joy with earthly desires. You can never find changeless, immortal happiness in My mortal, ever-changing earthly land. Do not build the mansion of your happiness upon the treacherous quicksand of material existence. If you want to be perennially happy, look within; play your role in the world as I, the Director, instruct you--not as you want to improvise, muddling up My drama! Then you will know that you only dreamed that you were unhappy and that you desired earthly things. Know now that you are My ever-happy, ever-perfect, ever-satisfied child, wanting naught of this imperfect, dissatisfying, delusive earth but to fulfill joyfully My plan for you here."

AFFIRMATION

I am the resistless fire of smiles. I shall fan myself with the breeze of God-Joy and shall blaze my way through the darkness of all minds. My smiles will bear His smiles, and whoever meets me will catch my divine joy. I shall strew fragrant purifying torches of smiles in all hearts.

Self-Realization Fellowship Lesson

"Thy Self-realization will blossom forth from thy soulful study"



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GOD! GOD! GOD!

By Paramahansa Yogananda

From the depths of slumber,
As I ascend the spiral stairway of wakefulness,
I whisper:
God! God! God!

Thou art the food, and when I break my fast
Of nightly separation from Thee,
I taste Thee, and mentally say:
God! God! God!

No matter where I go, the spotlight of my mind
Ever keeps turning on Thee;
And in the battle din of activity, my silent war-cry is ever:
God! God! God!

When boisterous storms of trials shriek
And worries howl at me,
I drown their noises, loudly chanting:
God! God! God!

When my mind weaves dreams
With threads of memories,
On that magic cloth I do emboss:
God! God! God!

Every night, in time of deepest sleep,
My peace dreams and calls: Joy! Joy! Joy!
And my joy comes singing evermore:
God! God! God!

In waking, eating, working, dreaming, sleeping,
Serving, meditating, chanting, divinely loving,
My soul constantly hums, unheard by any:
God! God! God!

PRAYER

Teach me, O God, to sow the seeds of wisdom, health, prosperity, and happiness in the garden of my life.

DESTROY DEPRESSION BY SUBSTITUTING PROSPERITY

According to the law of God and of Christian brotherhood, this earth was meant to provide the shelter and supply of all mankind; the wealth of mines and other resources was to be distributed equally to those performing equal labors. And God established the law of divine birthright: that all men and women are made in His image, hence are essentially divine; and that all nations are of one blood, being descendants of common parents, Adam and Eve. If you believe in this fundamental relationship, if you feel love for all the world's inhabitants as for your own family, recognizing no inner difference between any of the outwardly different nationalities, then you are establishing a legitimate astral right to your share of earth's capital.

Those who seek prosperity for themselves alone are in the end bound to become poor, or to suffer from mental inharmony; but those who consider the whole world as their home, and who really care and work for group or world prosperity, activate astral forces that lead them ultimately to the place where they can find the individual prosperity that is legitimately theirs. This is a sure and secret law. Whether one prospers is not dependent solely upon one's creative ability, but also upon his past actions, and on his present efforts to activate the astral law of cause and effect. If mankind as a whole behaved unselfishly, the power of that law would distribute prosperity equally to all men, without exception. Those who by potent good thoughts and actions rouse this astral power to create positive prosperity succeed wherever they go, whether they are in prosperous or poverty-stricken environments. Therefore, seek prosperity not solely for yourself and your family but for a wider group: your friends, your country, the whole world.

Eschew the desire for luxury. Learn to use less expensive things in an artistic way, with faith in the truth that you are a child of God and that as such you have all the Father's riches, all the wealth of the earth behind you. When by meditation you release your consciousness from its preoccupation with human limitations and realize yourself to be truly a son of God, you will know also that whatever God has, you have.

YOUR GOAL Most people live almost mechanically, unconscious of any
IN LIFE ideal or plan of life. They come on earth, struggle for
 a living, then leave the shores of mortality without knowing
 why they came here or what their duties really were. No matter what
one considers to be the goal of life, it is obvious that man's existence
is so undermined with immediate material needs that he must struggle to
satisfy them. The believer and the disbeliever in God must work hard to
provide food. Therefore it is important that man should concentrate

upon taking care of his real needs and not create additional burdens for himself by trying to fulfill useless desires for extra things.

Do not wander aimlessly, lost in the jungle of life, your happiness continuously bleeding away from thorn pricks of new desires. You must determine the goal of your life, and find the shortest road that can lead you there. Do not travel unknown roads, picking up new troubles. Too much ambition of the wrong kind is just as bad as too much passive contentment. As human beings, we have been endowed with needs and we must meet their demands. As man is a physical, mental, and spiritual being, he must look after his all-round welfare, avoiding overdevelopment of one side. To possess wonderful health and good appetite, with no money to maintain that health and to satisfy that hunger is agonizing. To have plenty of money and chronic indigestion is deplorable. To have robust health, and abundant wealth, and endless trouble with oneself and others, is pitiable. To have health, wealth, and mental efficiency, but lack peace and a knowledge of the ultimate truth is useless, disturbing, and dissatisfying.

EFFICIENCY Assuming that the goal of material life is maximum efficiency, peace, health, and success, what is the surest way to prosperity? Prosperity does not consist just in making money; it also consists in acquiring the mental efficiency by which one may uniformly acquire health, wealth, wisdom, and peace, at will. Great wealth does not necessarily bring health, peace, or efficiency; but acquirement of efficiency and peace are bound to bring a properly balanced material success. Most people develop mental efficiency as a by-product of their efforts for material success; but very few people realize that although money is made to give happiness, happiness cannot be found if in order to acquire it one develops an insatiable, soul-corroding desire for money.

Mental efficiency depends upon development of concentration. One should know the scientific method of concentration by which he may disengage his attention from objects of distraction and focus it upon one thing at a time. By the power of concentration, man can use the untold power of mind to accomplish that which he desires, and he can guard all doors through which failure may enter. All men of success have been men of great concentration, men who could dive deeply into their problems and come up with the pearls of right solutions. Most people are suffocated by distraction and are unable to fish out the pearls of success.

In concentrating upon his little physical needs man often forgets his greater need of developing mental efficiency in everything, and of acquiring divine contentment. Man is so busy multiplying the conditions of his physical comfort that he considers many unnecessary things as an essential part of his existence.

The man of powerful concentration should ask God to direct his focused mind to the right place for success that is rightfully his. Passive people want God to do all the work; egotists ascribe all their success to themselves. Passive people do not use the power of God residing in their intelligence. Egotists, although they may use their God-given

intelligence, fail to ask, and receive, God's direction as to where and how the intelligence should be used. I can blame inertia as the cause of failure in the first instance; but it hurts me to see intelligent egotists fail after making a real and well-thought-out effort.

However, even a man of concentration and power may dive deep into the sea of problems and still not find the pearl of success. There are many persons of powerful concentration, who do not know where to strike success; and many brilliant people with efficient minds have starved, or have had only meager success. This is where another factor in acquiring prosperity comes into consideration.

All prosperity is measured out to man according to the law of cause and effect, which governs not only this life but all past lives. That is why intelligent people may be born poor or unhealthy, and a mentally mediocre person may be born healthy and wealthy. All men were originally sons of God made in His image having free choice and equal power of accomplishment. But by misuse of his God-given reason and will power, man has fallen under the control of the natural law of cause and effect of action (karma) and has thereby limited his freedom to make a success of life. A man's success depends not only upon his intelligence and efficiency but upon the nature of his past actions. However, there is a way to overcome the unfavorable results of past actions. The causes of failure must be destroyed and a new cause for success set in motion.

GOD'S WILL AND YOUR WILL Mentally broadcast this truth: "My Father and I are One"--until you feel His overpowering, all-solacing bliss. When this happens, you have made the contact. Then affirm your celestial right by praying: "Father, I am Thy child. I will reason, I will will, I will act, but guide Thou my reason, will, and activity to the right thing that I should do in order to acquire health, wealth, peace, and wisdom."

Feel the presence of God first; then use your will and act. With His guidance you will be sure to harness your will and activity to the right goal.

GOD--THE REAL SOURCE OF OUR PROSPERITY God is the secret source of all mental power, peace, and prosperity. Why use the limited impractical human method of gaining prosperity? By visualizing prosperity or by affirmation, you may strengthen your subconscious mind, which in turn may encourage your conscious mind; but that is all that visualization alone can do. The conscious mind still has to achieve the success, and may be hindered by the unfavorable working of the law of cause and effect. The conscious mind alone cannot initiate a new cause that will bring positive success in any direction; but when the human mind attunes itself to God, in the state of superconsciousness, it can be sure of success; for the superconscious mind is in tune with the unlimited power of God, and is therefore able to create a new cause of success.

THE SECRET WAY TO PROSPERITY

The surest way to prosperity lies in establishing first your oneness with God and afterward claiming a divine son's share. You must make the blissful union with God first by regular, ever deepening meditation each day, according to the Self-Realization Fellowship techniques. When you achieve that attunement, your status will be changed from that of a mortal beggar to that of a divine son and you will automatically gain what you need. The omnipresent Father knows all the needs of a true son.

If in this way the poor win victories in the struggle to satisfy the demands of real necessities, they receive contentment and may live and die rich. That is real prosperity. But to live without contentment and die spiritually poor in spite of material riches is real poverty. Maintain a prosperous attitude by smiling, no matter what happens. Do not be afraid to sell the bonds of smiles when the market of happiness is low. Keep smiling while planning and acting for success, and your smiles will fetch priceless treasure in the end. Wise, persevering activity with unfading smiles brings sure success.

PRAYER FOR DIVINE GUIDANCE AND PROSPERITY

Many persons have dived into the ocean of Thine abundance again and again to seek the pearls of opulence, power, and wisdom; but only a few divers have found them. These few persons have praised the wondrous riches of Thy sea because they dived well and found the secret treasure nook. Those who dived in the wrong places blamed Thy blue brine of abundance for being devoid of the most desired treasures. Many persons perish diving in Thy treasure sea, being devoured by monsters of selfishness, greed, faithlessness, doubt, idleness, and skepticism.

Heavenly Father, I will not say that Thine ocean of everything is empty, for Thou wilt show me that the fault is with my diving. I will put on the diving apparel of faith, power, and fortitude, and Thou wilt direct my mind to dive in the right place, where Thy bounty is hidden.

SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Real success does not perish with this earthly life. Your success is conditioned by the law of cause and effect and by your environment. Jesus said: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all things shall be added unto you." When you seek success by the material way, you are governed by the law of cause and effect, but when you have communion with God first, then success is given to you in innumerable ways both subtle and material. Compare the lives of saints and others who have lived with God, to the lives of nonspiritual people. The saints have everything because they have God.

Do not cry because of lowly position while you are on earth, nor beg for an improvement in it. In the last analysis everybody will go to sleep in the cold earth. Every cent must be left behind by the millionaire. All children of God are equal. Don't desire things just because your friends have them. If it is money or health you are seeking, de-

pending upon God is the surest way to obtain them. When you deserve them, you will get them.

Success must always come from God. The world can give you just so much and no more. But God can give you health, prosperity, and wisdom without limit. Gold is not made by man, but by God. Man only makes the stamp. All things come from God. Not a grain of corn or wheat, or a dollar, is made by man, but by God. Why should you look to man for prosperity and health and happiness. Why not go to the Source of life, without whose power you cannot live.

Everything else has limited power, but God has unlimited power. Seek success from the Source that can give to you unfailingly. For fifty years you may try to make a million dollars, and then lose it. Do not go that way. Why go the way of limitation? Seek the way that can never fail.

God may take away something from you so that you will cease being immersed in matter and seek Him; then when you seek Him, you will find that which you lost. Isn't it greater to sweep the streets with God in your heart--working through you--than to be a millionaire riding in a Rolls Royce, with a cancer gnawing at your stomach and your entire being centered on your wealth?

The conscious state is marked by restlessness and attachment. When you are greedy, your ego is centered on the palate, and it is the same with the other senses. That is why the saints say: "Possession is not a sin, but to be possessed by possessions is wrong." You have to detach your ego from its attachment to the senses: "I miss my coffee; I feel nervous." That is what attachment does.

* * *

AFFIRMATION

Since our thoughts and words are the seeds that will bring forth our harvest of the future, I will begin today to fill my consciousness with the ideas of abundance.

Self-Realization Fellowship Lesson

"Thy Self-realization will blossom forth from thy soulful study"



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FOR THEE I WAS MADE

By Paramahansa Yogananda

I was made for Thee alone. I was made for dropping flowers of devotion gently at Thy feet on the altar of the morning.

My hands were made to serve Thee willingly; to remain folded in adoration, waiting for Thy coming; and when Thou comest, to bathe Thy feet with my tears.

My voice was made to sing Thy glory.

My feet were made to seek Thy temples everywhere.

My eyes were made a chalice to hold Thy burning love and the wisdom falling from Thy nature's hands.

My ears were made to catch the music of Thy footsteps echoing through the halls of space, and to hear Thy divine melodies flowing through all heart-tracts of devotion.

My lips were made to breathe forth Thy praises and Thine intoxicating inspirations.

My love was made to throw incandescent searchlight flames to find Thee hidden in the forest of my desires.

My heart was made to respond to Thy call alone.

My soul was made to be the channel through which Thy love might flow uninterruptedly into all thirsty souls.

PRAYER

O Divine Sculptor, chisel
Thou my life to Thy design.

HUMBLENESS VERSUS EGOTISM

Analyze your thoughts and see on what throne of consciousness your ego is seated; what kind of consciousness is predominant in your mind. Are your thoughts centered around yourself, or on others? If the former, your selfish egotism drives wise men and truth away from you. Try to be humble instead of egotistical and through the magnetism of humbleness attract the protecting presence of friends, saints, and God.

Humbleness is a fertile valley of consciousness where the rain of God's wisdom falls fruitfully. As on a mountain peak no rain can gather, so also on an upthrust ego no waters of knowledge can collect. Egotism shuts the door of recipience through which knowledge enters. Humbleness opens the portals wide and bids all wisdom come within. Egotism is an obvious ugliness written on the face of the egotist, and repels people; whereas humbleness is a fragrance that makes the bearer sweetly attractive to all. Egotism is born of an inferiority complex, which may appear as a so-called superiority complex, whereas humbleness is born of wisdom or knowledge of one's true Self.

Egotism refuses to investigate truth, whereas humbleness is always ready to learn. Egotism slaps wisdom in the face; humbleness entreats the lotus feet of truth to enter the innermost sanctum of the soul. Egotism reveals its smallness by ineffectually trying to make others feel small. Humbleness is the manifestation of an understanding heart, and sets an example of greatness for others to follow. Egotism is the brittle imitation armor of deluded souls, while humbleness is the inner costume of saints. Egotism repels friends and truth; humbleness attracts friends and understanding. The egotist, like an empty vessel, makes much noise, whereas the humble man is like a cask filled with the precious wine of wisdom.

Man in his egotism reveals a limitation of knowledge; whereas God, who is all wisdom, is humble and never egotistical, because He knows everything. Humbleness is magnetic and is a distributor of happiness, and invites the all-protecting wisdom of true friends and God. The egotist shuts out God, daring to think much of himself while ignoring the omnipresence of God. The humble person knows that there can be no one greater than God, and therefore he draws God to himself through the fragrance of humility.

The egotistical man has plenty of time to speak to others of his importance because he is not busy performing outstanding deeds, but the really great man is humble because he is so busy doing remarkable things that he has no time to speak of his greatness. The egotistical man

watches some of his qualities so gloatingly that he forgets to acquire more good qualities; in fact he manages to be satisfied with his small attainments by making them look big to himself. Consequently he does not progress. Humbleness belongs to the great, who do not stand apart and exultingly watch over their greatness. Jesus said that the least, or the most humble one, is the greatest in the kingdom of God.

YOU WILL REAP If you want to be loved, start loving others who WHAT YOU SOW need your love. If you expect others to be honest with you, then start being honest yourself. If you do not want others to be wicked, then you must avoid doing evil yourself. If you want others to sympathize with you, start showing sympathy to those around you. If you want to be respected, you must learn to be respectful to everyone, both young and old. If you want a display of peace from others, you must be peaceful yourself. If you want others to be religious, start being spiritual yourself. Remember, whatever you want others to be, first be that yourself, then you will find others responding in like manner to you.

If you can discover and face your own faults without developing an inferiority complex, and if you can keep busy correcting yourself, then you will be using your time more profitably than if you spent it in just wishing others to be better. Your good example will do more to change others than your wishing, your wrath, or your words.

As a rule only the small-minded persons, and men and women who are ostentatious over just a little knowledge, are offensively and dangerously egotistical. Such pride not only offends wiser people, it leads the egotist himself to his doom; through his own shortsightedness he becomes entangled in difficulties and failures.

LAW OF SERVICE The law of service to others is secondary and corollary to the law of self-interest or self-preservation, which may be termed "selfishness." No sane man ever does anything without a reason. No action is performed without reference to a direct or indirect thought which is selfish. Giving service is indispensable to receiving service; therefore, to serve others by giving financial, mental, or moral help is to find self-satisfaction. You can prove that service is not wholly unselfish by asking yourself this question: If you knew beyond a doubt that by service to others your own soul would be lost rather than strengthened, would you serve? If Jesus had felt that by sacrificing his life on the altar of ignorance he would displease God, would he have acted as he did? No! He knew that although he had to lose the body he was gaining his Father's favor and emancipating his own soul. Such immortal sons of God, and all martyrs and saints, make a good investment--they spend the little mortal body to gain immortal life.

RESURRECT YOUR One important thing you have to do is resurrect CONSCIOUSNESS your consciousness from the environment of ignorance. You must blame yourself for environmental troubles which you have been creating, consciously or unconsciously, somewhere, sometime in the past. Free yourself from all neuroses or

complexes. What are you afraid of? You are neither a man nor a woman. You are not what you think you are; you are an immortal. But be not immortally identified with human habits, because they are your deadliest enemies. Even in crucifixion Jesus could keep his loving attitude and say: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." So must you forgive your trials and say: "My soul is being resurrected; my power to overcome is greater than all the oppression of my trials, because I am a child of God."

Resurrect your soul from dreams of frailties into the light of eternal wisdom. What is the method? Meditation, exercise, relaxation, self-control, right diet, fortitude, and an undaunted attitude of mind. Do not acknowledge defeat. To acknowledge it brings greater defeat. You have unlimited power; you must cultivate that power--that is all. Meditation is the way to resurrect your soul from the bondage of the body and all your trials. Meditate at the feet of the Infinite. Learn to saturate yourself with God. Your trials may be great, but your greatest enemy is yourself--your ego. Your real Self is immortal; your trials are mortal. They are changeable, but you are unchangeable. You can unleash eternal powers to shatter your trials. When you receive, or realize by meditation the omnipresence of God, you can develop your mental powers by serious application. Your mental powers will then expand and your cup of realization will be big enough to hold the ocean of knowledge.

EGO'S FAILURE Man's attachment to matter keeps the soul confined to the body prison and prevents it from finding freedom in God--in the realm of eternal Bliss. The ego attempts to satisfy through material channels the soul's constant, insatiable longing for God. Far from accomplishing its objective, ego-driven sense gratification only increases man's misery. The soul's hunger can never be appeased by indulging the senses. When man realizes this and masters his ego--that is, when he achieves self-control--life becomes glorified by God-Bliss while he is still in the flesh. Then instead of being enslaved by material desires and appetites, his attention is transferred to the heart of Omnipresence, resting there forever in the hidden joy in everything.

THOUGHTS TO REMEMBER

An inferiority complex is born of a secret awareness of real or imagined weaknesses. In trying to compensate for such weaknesses, a person may build an armor of false pride, and exhibit an inflated ego. Then those who do not understand the real cause of such an attitude may say the person has a superiority complex. Both manifestations of his inner inharmony are destructive to Self-development. Both are fostered by imagination and by ignoring facts, while neither belongs to the true, all-powerful nature of the soul. Found your self-confidence upon actual achievements plus the knowledge that your real Self (the soul) can never be "inferior" in any way, then you will be free from all complexes.

A SAINT WHO CHOSE A KING AS HIS SPIRITUAL GUIDE

Long ago there lived a great sage named Byasa. He was the writer of the greatest Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita. By his great spiritual power he invoked a saintly soul to enter the womb of his wife. As the baby grew within the womb, he taught the unborn child the secrets of the scriptures through the subconscious mind of the mother. This baby, when born, was named Shuka Deva. Because of his prenatal training he proved to be a most unusual child. At the age of seven he was already versed in the difficult Hindu scriptures and was ready to renounce the world and seek a true master.

In India it is customary for a devotee to seek out spiritual teachers until he finds the one whom he recognizes as his own God-chosen master or guru. The novice, through inner fitful urgings, receives lessons from various sources; but when his spiritual ardor becomes very great, God sends him a guru. God uses the divine soul-vehicle of the guru as His messenger or instrument to bring the novice back to his spiritual home in Omnipresence.

When Shuka Deva decided to go in search of his guru, his father advised him to go to King Janaka, the ruler of the province. As Shuka Deva entered the royal palace he saw the king sitting on an emerald- and diamond-studded golden throne surrounded by courtiers and by scantily clad women who were fanning him with big palm leaves (as is the custom in India during the hot season). King Janaka was smoking a big oriental pipe. This sight shocked Shuka Deva; he turned back and started walking briskly out of the palace. He muttered: "Shame on my father for sending me to that matter-soaked king! How could such a worldly man be my teacher?"

But King Janaka was both a king and a saint. He was in the world, but not of the world. Highly advanced spiritually, he could telepathically sense the thoughts of the fleeing Shuka Deva. The saint-king sent a messenger after the boy, commanding him to come back. Thus the master and the devotee met. The king sent his attendants away and at once entered an absorbing discourse on God. Four hours passed; Shuka Deva was getting restless and hungry, but he dared not disturb the God-intoxicated King Janaka.

Another hour had passed when two messengers arrived, exclaiming: "Your Majesty, the whole city is on fire! The flames threaten to spread toward the palace. Won't you come and supervise the efforts to extinguish the flames?" The king replied: "I am too busy discussing the all-protecting God with my friend Shuka Deva. I have no time for anything else. Go and help others to put out the fire."

When another hour had passed, the same two messengers came running to King Janaka and cried: "Your Majesty, please flee! The flames have caught the palace and are fast approaching your chamber." The king answered: "Never mind! Don't disturb me, for I am drinking the wine of God with my friend. Go! do the best you can."

Shuka Deva was puzzled by the king's attitude, but he tried to remain likewise unaffected by the excitement. A short time later two scorched messengers leaped in front of King Janaka, shouting: "Mighty King, behold the flames approaching your throne! Run! before both of you are burned to death." The king replied: "You both run and save yourselves. I feel too peaceful in the arms of the all-protecting God to fear the audacity of destructive flames." The messengers fled. The flames leaped toward the pile of books that Shuka Deva had by his side; but the king sat motionless, indifferent.

The alarmed Shuka Deva lost his poise, he half rose from his seat and began slapping at the flames in order to save his precious books. King Janaka then smilingly waved his hand and the fire miraculously disappeared. Shuka Deva, in great awe, sank back to his seat.

The king said calmly: "O young Shuka Deva, you thought of me as a matter-drenched king--but look at yourself! You forsook the all-protecting thought of God to protect a pile of books, while I paid no attention to my burning kingdom and palace. God worked this miracle to show you that although you are a renunciant, you are more attached to your books than to God, or than I am to my kingdom, even though I live in the world instead of a hermitage." Humbled, the young Shuka Deva then recognized the saint-king to be his guru-preceptor.

King Janaka put Shuka Deva through a process of discipline to teach him the art of living in the world without acquiring misery-making attachment to it. One day the king gave his new disciple two cup-shaped lamps, filled to the brim with oil. Janaka said: "Hold a lamp on the palm of each hand, and enter all the gorgeously furnished rooms of the palace. Come back to me after you have seen everything; but remember, I will refuse to train you further if you spill a single drop of oil on the carpets."

King Janaka instructed two messengers to accompany Shuka Deva and to refill the two lamps with oil as quickly as they burned down. It was a hard test; but, after two hours, Shuka Deva returned triumphantly without having dropped any oil from the lamps in his hands.

The king said: "Young Shuka Deva, tell me in detail what you saw in each chamber of my palace." To this Shuka Deva replied: "Royal Preceptor, my only accomplishment was that I did not spill any oil on your carpets. My mind was so concentrated on the thought of not dripping oil that I did not notice anything in the rooms."

King Janaka then declared: "I am disappointed! You have not completely passed my test. My injunctions were that you should see everything in all the chambers of my palace and that you should not drip any oil from the lamps. Go back with the lamps, and remember, no spilling of the oil while you are looking carefully at everything about the palace."

After ten hours, Shuka Deva calmly returned. He had not allowed any oil to drip, nor was he sweating with excitement as before. He could

answer all the king's questions about the contents, however minute, of all the palace chambers.

King Janaka was pleased. "My son," he said gently, "attachment to possessions, and not possession itself, is the source of misery. In this world we do not own anything; we are only given the use of things. Some have more to use than others; but remember, the millionaire and the poor man alike have to leave everything, all possessions, when death comes. One should not live a one-sided life thinking only of God and neglecting one's duties in the world--like your concentrating on the oil lamps and not seeing my palace. But on the second trip you kept your attention principally on the lamps without spilling oil, and at the same time thoroughly and minutely saw everything in the palace. So should you keep your attention on God, not letting a drop of your desire slip away from the lamp of God-revealing wisdom; and yet devote part of your attention to thoroughly performing the God-given duties of maintaining yourself and others given into your charge."

This instructive story shows the basis of the world's troubles. Indifference to spiritual matters leads to selfishness and unequal prosperity amidst plenty, and finally to widespread economic depressions. Hence those who want the unlimited Divine Power to work for them in business and family affairs ought to be as earnest about meditation as they are about earning money. He who makes it his business to have communion with God first will find imperishable inner happiness as well as outer material comforts. We must not be too busy to try to realize the presence of God. If God stops our hearts from beating, we will not have any chance for business success. Since all our success depends upon powers borrowed from God, we should give enough time to God-communion.

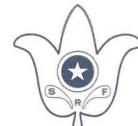
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AFFIRMATION

All my powers are but powers borrowed from Thee.
No one is greater than Thou, O my Father. I cease to
live and express without Thy wisdom and strength. Thou
art so big; I am so little. Teach me not to be proud.

Self-Realization Fellowship Lesson

"Thy Self-realization will blossom forth from thy soulful study"



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THY MAGIC POWER

By Paramahansa Yogananda

Make my eyes behold what Thou dost see.
Make my ears catch the bursting of Thy voice
In the billows of all creation.
Make my speech the fountain of nectared words
Showered over souls scorched with bitterness.
Make my lips utter naught but the songs
Of Thy love and joy.

Beloved, work through me the work of truth.
Keep my hands busy serving all my brothers.
Keep my voice forever casting seeds of love
For Thee on the soil of seeking souls.
Keep my feet ever moving on the pathway
Of right action.
Lead me from dark ignorance to Thy light of wisdom,
Lead me from temporary pleasures
To Thine ever new joy within.
Make my love Thy love,
That I may know all things as mine.

Father, throb through my heart and make me feel
Sympathy for all living creatures.
Kindle in me the flame of Thy wisdom
And burn the dark forest of my mundane desires.
Let Thy reason be the preceptor of my reason.
Think through my thoughts,
For it is Thy magic power
Which uses my mind as Thy mind,
My hands as Thy hands,
My feet as Thy feet,
My soul as Thy spirit to perform Thy holy works.

PRAYER

Divine Mother, teach me to till
the soil of my mind with discipline,
and sow the seeds of good habits.

GOOD AND BAD HABITS

THE POWER OF HABIT The power of habit rules the day-to-day actions of the average person. A good many people let their whole life go by, making repeated good resolutions to improve, without ever succeeding in establishing and following new patterns of action that are wholesome. More often than not we find ourselves doing, not what we wish to do, but what we are accustomed to doing. That is why materially minded people find it difficult to be spiritually minded even when they try hard. Spiritual people find it similarly difficult to be material even when associating with worldly persons. It is difficult for vicious people to be good and kind; it is just as unthinkable for noble persons to behave meanly.

Habits are automatic mental machines installed by man to exercise economy in the initial use of will power and effort required to perform specific actions. Habits make the performance of such actions easier. Friendly good habits are very helpful in making the performance of difficult good deeds easier. Evil habits, however sympathetic, are deadly, inasmuch as they are diehards and keep on disturbing the senses even when strongly commanded to cease doing so. Bad habits and sin are temporary misery-making grafts on the soul. They must be thrown out sometime, as they are not a part of man's free nature and therefore cannot be tolerated indefinitely by his soul.

Very seldom do we realize that the health, success, and wisdom outlook of our life entirely depends upon the issue of the battle between our good and bad habits. Henceforth we should not allow our bodily kingdom to be occupied by bad habits. We should put bad habits to flight by training all our diverse good habits in the art of victorious psychological warfare.

The soldiers of bad habits and of ill health and negation are invigorated by specific bad actions; whereas the soldiers of good habits become stimulated by specific good actions. Do not feed bad habits with bad actions. Starve them out by self-control. Feed good habits with good actions.

INFLUENCE OF EARLY HABITS The habits that were formed earliest in your life have kept you quite busy until now; unwelcome habits have perhaps crowded out many worthwhile activities. The social world moves on the wheels of certain habits. Few people notice whether it is headed for the mire of petty engagements that choke the progressive activities of life, or if perchance is rolling recklessly

toward the chasm of spiritual ignorance.

People should be taught from childhood to develop discrimination by meditative contact with the superior pleasures of peace, harmony, and joy, and should form spiritual habits early. Since we are ruled by habits--which form our tendencies, moods, and desires--if bad habits are in the lead our moods and actions become evil. So, the precedence of good habits is desirable, as they can guide our actions and moods to a happy goal.

Wrong habits may promise a little temporary happiness, but ultimately they bring misery and destroy happiness. People who yield to the temptation of harmful habits do not fully realize this. Eventually they become so used to these habits that they helplessly drift on, becoming more and more inured to the subtle tortures of continuing their wrong habits. Finally they reach a state where the thought of forsaking the poisonous comfort of their wrong habits is actually shocking. Persons used to the darkness of bad habits naturally hate the light and comfort of good habits.

ENVIRONMENT AND COMPANIONS Undiscriminating association with the world creates bad habits in you, but the world will not be responsible for your wrong actions springing from those habits. Then why give all your time to the world? Reserve at least an hour a day for actual soul-inspiring God-realization. Doesn't the Giver of the world itself--of your family, money, everything--deserve one twenty-fourth part of your day?

Material habits keep millions of people away from God. People of bad habits seek bad company. People of worldly habits seek materially minded companions. People of meditative, peaceful habits seek the company of Christlike saints. There is one thing very good about bad habits: seldom do they keep their promises. Bad habits are easily found to be habitual liars and deceivers. That is why souls can never remain perpetually in bondage. Never condemn the sinner, for he knows too well the fears and tortures of sin. Do not drown him in your hatred, but give him a chance to have his own knocks; then he will be only too willing to be lifted up.

People do not intentionally turn to evil, nor do they really enjoy being evil. They are evil because they do not know the greater charm of good habits, and are unable to compare and select the best. Or they fall under the influence of others' opinions, and unconsciously are led to evil. Some people are evil owing to the precedence of evil in their environment in early life; and some people are evil because they do not know any better. People who are evil behave so because they wrongly think that through evil they will get happiness easily. People cling to evil because they falsely magnify the dread and torture supposed to be involved in self-control. People are evil because they think they are compelled to be so by the powerful influence of evil instincts, or wrong determinations.

SENSE SLAVERY If you are a slave to your senses, you cannot be happy. If you are a master of your desires and appetites, you can be a really happy person. If you overeat against your will; if you wish anything contrary to your conscience; if you act wrongly, forced by your senses, against the wish of your inner Self; then you cannot be happy. People who are slaves to the senses find that their evil habits compel them to do things which will hurt them. Stubborn bad habits bludgeon your will power every time it tries to take the lead and guide your thoughts to the kingdom of right action. The remedy lies in rescuing your will power from the imprisoning power of the senses.

Almost every soul is a prisoner of the senses. The soul's attention is lured away from its inner kingdom in the medulla oblongata, the spiritual eye, and the spinal plexuses, to the outer regions of the body, where greed, temptation, and attachment have their strongholds. The devotee who wants to lead King Soul away from the misery-making slums of the senses finds that he cannot do so without a severe clash between the lurking robbers of sense attachment and the soul's divine soldiers of wisdom and self-control.

EVIL HABITS CANNOT You must cure yourself of evil habits by cauterizing them with the opposite good habits. For instance, if you have a bad habit of telling lies and by so doing have lost many friends, start the opposite good habit of telling the truth. It takes time to form either a good habit or a bad one. It is difficult for a bad person to be good, or for a good person to be bad; yet, remember that once you become good, it will be natural and easy for you to be good. Likewise, if you cultivate an evil habit, you will be compelled eventually to be evil, in spite of your desire, and you will have to pray: "Father, my spirit is willing, but my flesh is weak." That is why it is worthwhile to cultivate the habit of being good and happy. People seeking happiness must avoid the influence of bad habits which lead to evil actions. Evil actions produce misery sooner or later. Misery corrodes body, mind, and soul like a burning acid, and cannot be endured long.

I do not believe that any human being really means to be evil. The criminal does wrong because there is no realization, deep in his consciousness, of the true joy of right living. He is unable to see how he hurts himself through his errors; he would not want to commit error if he could really understand the misery his errors will bring. The sin of all sins is ignorance. That is why Jesus said: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." If the criminal could compare his evil way with the right way of living--by actual experience--would he still continue to follow evil? No. We are all seeking happiness.

Evil cannot keep man under the influence of error forever, because he is made in the image of God. In the beginning, the spiritual aspirant finds his soldiers of discrimination guided by the desire to be good. Later, as he meditates longer and prays ardently for inner help, he finds that a veteran occult general--the calm conviction of inborn intuition, or awakening inner light--emerges from the superconscious to

guide the forces of discrimination. The emergence of this awakening inner light is the result of good habits of the past

CULTIVATE
SPIRITUAL
HABITS

The power of habit can be especially advantageous on the spiritual path. If one is accustomed to meditating and contacting God, one will greatly desire to meditate longer and more often in order to contact God more frequently. Those who meditate little, and vaguely feel they may someday contact God, find that their desire to do so vanishes when they are invaded by the powerful habit of restlessness. Likewise, those who are accustomed to being calm attract more calmness and serenity, while those who are seldom calm find their precarious calmness easily disturbed when restlessness invades. Deep-seated unspiritual habits can entirely destroy the power of weak spiritual habits.

Habits of thought are mental magnets that attract specific things relative to their kind and quality. Material habits will always bring material results, and spiritual habits attract spiritual results.

Don't let unhealthful ideas float down the stream of your habit-forming thoughts. Watch the quality of the books you read. Watch the kind and quality of the people with whom you associate. Watch the influence upon yourself of family, business associates, and close friends who constantly associate with you. Many people are unsuccessful because their families have infected them and their subconscious minds with habit-forming, progress-paralyzing, discouraging thoughts.

When one meditates often and cultivates the taste for peace and contentment, and gradually forsakes indulgence in sense pleasures, he has a better chance for spiritual emancipation. The best way of all is to cultivate the habit of contacting superior soul pleasures through meditation, immediately upon awakening. Then, while filled with the superior joy of the soul, you may enjoy such innocent, harmless pleasures of the senses as eating, meeting friends, and so on, without any sense attachment. In this way the soul will spiritualize, or change the quality of, all material enjoyments.

The beginner on the spiritual path may take courage from this thought: no matter how many times one suffers from powerful attacks of sense attractions and restlessness-producing material desires, he finds the meditation-born, occult soldiers of his life, and of past lives, coming to his aid. A person who is always restless, and never meditates, thinks that he is all right because he has become accustomed to being a slave of restlessness. However, as soon as he tries to meditate and be calm, he finds resistance from the bad habit of mental fickleness. But after he has formed the habit of meditation, he learns that when the habit of restlessness tries to usurp the throne of his consciousness, it finds the new meditation-guard and the awakened occult soldiers of past lives offering resistance.

THOUGHTS TO REMEMBER

You are the sole creator of good or bad habits. Therefore till the soil of your mind with discipline, and sow the seeds of good habits. To replenish your mind thoroughly with good habits you must be patient in cultivating them, while you continuously keep weeding out the bad habits.

Distinguish between the soul's lasting happiness and the temporary pleasures of the senses. Strengthen your will power. Do not be enslaved by bad habits, but be guided by good habits, formed through cultivating good company and practicing meditation. Above all, be guided by wisdom. Stay away from evil by exercising good judgment and discrimination; do not allow yourself to be compelled by habits. Exercise your power of free choice to adopt the good in everything.

THE MAN WHO THOUGHT THAT HE WAS PROOF AGAINST TEMPTATION

Mr. J. was a confirmed drunkard, a nuisance to his family and to his neighbors. One day he met a saint. The experience was so uplifting that he took a vow to abstain from drinking. He asked his servants to hide his costly wines in locked boxes and to keep the key, instructing them to serve the wine only to his friends. Everything went along all right with Mr. J. for some time because of his joy in the power of his new resolution against drink. For a while he did not feel at all the gripping lure of the liquor habit.

As time went on, he began to feel wholly proof against temptation to drink. He asked his servants to leave the key to the wine room with him so that he could serve the red liquid to his friends himself. Feeling more and more mental security, he came to the conclusion that it was too much to bother to go to the cellar to get liquor for his friends; he would keep a few bottles upstairs in a cupboard.

Several days passed without mishap, and Mr. J. thought: "Since I am proof against the temptation to drink, let me look at the sparkling red wine in the bottle." So he had the wine decanter filled and placed on a table. Every day he looked at the bottle. Then he thought: "Since I am absolutely proof against the temptation, I may just as well enjoy the smell of the wine."

A few more days passed by. Then he thought: "Since I am no longer bound by the sense of taste and therefore no longer care for wine, I will prove it to myself by taking a mouthful, tasting it, and then spitting it out." He did this. Then he thought: "Since I am now so strong, I am surely proof against liquor. There can be no harm if I drink once and swallow a little." He tried this. Then he thought: "Since I have conquered the wine habit, let me take only one swallow at a time, as many times as my unenslaved will desires." In no time at all he was drunk--and he helplessly kept on drinking every day, just as he had done before.

The preceding story shows how the liquor-drinking habit of Mr. J. was put down temporarily by the strong resolution to conquer. But success was not lasting because Mr. J. failed to realize that his resolution against drinking liquor had not had enough time to ripen into a good habit.

It takes from five to eight years to substitute a good habit for a strong bad habit. Until the strong good habit is formed, one should stay away from his former evil habit-forming environment or actions. Our story shows the results when one disregards this law: Mr. J. brought his wine bottle near him, and gradually reawakened the memory of the drinking habit, and with it his former uncontrollable desire for liquor.

Therefore, to prevent the nourishment of bad habits, one should get away from surroundings that encourage him in wrong actions, and, above all, one should never deliberately bring evil thoughts into the mind. Resist evil thoughts, which lead one to seek evil surroundings.

Mr. J. not only made a mistake in bringing liquor so near him; he also failed to recognize the psychological weapons that his bad habit used to defeat his good resolution. The liquor habit remained unseen, hidden in his subconscious mind, secretly sending out armed spies of desire and pleasing thoughts of taste to prepare the way for reinvasion. Thus the liquor habit came back and usurped the free will of Mr. J., enslaving body and soul.

Anyone who has a tendency to live on the misery-producing material plane should learn to stay away from tempting environments outside and to cast out thoughts of temptation from within. He should surround himself with the right kind of environment, and keep his mind filled with the kind of thoughts that will produce the good effect he truly desires.

AFFIRMATION

I form new habits of thinking by seeing the good everywhere, and in beholding all things as the perfect idea of God made manifest.

Self-Realization Fellowship Lesson

"Thy Self-realization will blossom forth from thy soulful study"



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THE ONLY REALITY

By Paramahansa Yogananda

I take a sacred vow!
Never will I throw my love's gaze
Below the horizon of my constant thought of Thee!
Never will I take down the vision of my lifted eyes
And place it on aught but Thee!
Never will I turn my mind to do anything
Which reminds me not of Thee!

I will abhor nightmares of ignorant acts.
I will love dreams of noble achievements.
I will love all dreams of goodness,
For they are Thy dreams.

I may dream many dreams.
But I am ever awake thinking of Thee.
In the sacred fire of constant remembrance
Burning on my soul's altar,
I will ever behold Thy face
With my ever watchful eyes of love.

Through Thy grace, I know that health and sickness,
Life and death, are but dreams.
When I finish my dream story of good dreams
And awaken behind the world-painted screen of delusion,
I shall behold Thee as the One Reality.

PRAYER

O Divine Shepherd of Infinite Perception, rescue the lambkins of my thoughts, lost in the wilderness of restlessness, and lead them into the fold of silence.

THE ART OF CONCENTRATION AND MEDITATION

The term "meditation" is sometimes used interchangeably with "concentration" in ordinary speech and writing. Self-Realization Fellowship teachings make this distinction between them:

Concentration is focusing the mind through interest and determination on any line of thought.

Meditation is the application of concentration solely to know God.

In these Lessons the terms "meditate" and "meditation" are often used in a broader sense to mean the devotee's attempts to still the mind and achieve perfect concentration on God.

These are generalizations. The student of Self-Realization Lessons will learn these further distinctions of the terms:

Real concentration is one-pointed focusing of the mind on a particular thought by means of definite scientific methods.

Real meditation is focusing the scientifically concentrated mind solely on God, by definite spiritual techniques.

Thus the Hong-Sau Technique of Concentration that you will soon learn will help you to achieve the one-pointed concentration necessary for real meditation. Through faithful practice you will soon experience glimpses of soul awareness and divine peace and joy.

The Om Technique of Meditation that you will learn later is a method for applying the Hong-Sau concentrated mind on a particular aspect of God--as Om, the Cosmic Sound of Holy Ghost--to experience definite realization of God's presence in you and all creation.

Every activity requires a certain amount of concentration, and no effective action can be performed without deep concentration. Businessmen or artists or students in school as well as spiritual seekers must know the art of focusing all the powers of attention upon a single point in order to succeed in their respective vocations. Concentration denotes first the withdrawal of the attention from objects of distraction and then focusing of that recalled attention upon one thing at a time. The primary factor in concentration consists in withdrawing the attention from all diverting objects.

During the practice of concentration and meditation, environment is extremely important in gaining the best results. There are two kinds of environment: inner and outer.

Outer environment is one's physical surroundings (noisy or quiet, and so forth), and inner environment is one's mental state (distracted or serene).

You can be mentally restless even while sitting in a very quiet place with the body motionless and relaxed. It is therefore necessary to calm yourself interiorly, whether outer conditions are suitable or not, before real concentration can begin. Quiet places are naturally conducive to inner calmness, but if you are determined, you can remain inwardly undisturbed regardless of any commotion around you. So do not stop concentrating or meditating just because you cannot find a peaceful place! An inner environment of mental calmness despite outer distractions is the best altar for concentration and meditation.

MEDITATION IS THE WAY TO GOD

You can never have a truly happy life both inwardly and outwardly unless you use the God-given power of concentration to reclaim the forgotten image of God within you. Only then can you solve the mysteries of life and control destiny. Through the art of meditation one learns how actually to contact Divine Bliss--which is God--by the faithful application of the science of spiritual law. The material scientist experiments with cosmic laws in nature to find out the secrets of her creation; and the spiritual scientist ought to apply his divinely bestowed powers of concentration, meditation, and intuition to investigate the divine laws by which he may learn the secrets of Spirit.

MEDITATION PLUS ACTIVITY

To seek God does not, as some imagine, relieve one of the various physical, mental, and spiritual duties he has in this human life; nor should the search for God be used as an excuse for neglect of one's other responsibilities. In order to fulfill better his earthly duties, the climbing spiritual aspirant should learn to meditate; then he can banish dark ignorance and weakening disease from the temple of his life and perceive therein God's perfect presence.

WHEN AND WHERE TO MEDITATE

The living room produces conversation consciousness; the library, reading consciousness; the bathroom, cleansing consciousness; and the bedroom, sleeping consciousness. Similarly, a little place used only for meditation produces the divine silence consciousness. A small room with one or more windows, or a closet with a window, or a screened-off corner, or any quiet room that is neither too warm nor too cold, or a mountaintop or forest in the summer--any one of these is suitable for meditation. Even when riding in an automobile or train, or if you sleep in the same room with others, you can still practice meditation while pretending to be asleep.

If possible, select a noiseless place. In your small meditation room or screened-off corner put a straight armless chair facing east. This will be your asan, your meditation seat. Place on it a woolen

blanket so as to cover the back and the seat and run down on the floor under your feet. The blanket may be covered with a silk cloth also, if you wish. The silk and wool insulate your body against earth currents, so that their opposite magnetic pull will not impede the flow of the life current and consciousness which you are trying to draw upward through the spinal centers to the higher centers of divine consciousness in the brain.

Be sure to practice meditation in the early morning and before going to bed at night, to take advantage of certain pronounced physiological changes that take place at these times: in the morning, poisons are thrown off as the body, calm and refreshed by sleep, assumes the active state; at night the body is again relaxed; the life force can easily be withdrawn from the sensory nerves, and directed into the spine and upward toward the centers of God-awareness in the brain.

Don't drug yourself with too much sleep and thus lose your vitality. Six hours of sleep is plenty for most adults. Wake up at 5:30 a.m. and meditate. This time is suitable because your home and the neighborhood are usually quiet then. Metaphysically this is suitable because the rays and vibrations of the dawn are vitalizing and spiritually uplifting. At night, meditate from 9 to 10 o'clock, or 10 to 11 o'clock, or 10 to 11:30 o'clock. When everybody else is asleep and quiet, you remain awake in God.

The more sweetening you put in water, the sweeter it becomes. Likewise, the longer you meditate intensely, the greater will be your spiritual advancement. On Sundays, holidays, and do-nothing loafing days, meditate in the morning from 6 to 9 o'clock, and from 9 to 12 o'clock at night. Remember that the longer you practice, with intensity, the nearer you will be to joyous contact with the silent God. Intensity consists in making today's meditation deeper than yesterday's meditation, and tomorrow's deeper than today's!

FOUR RELATED
FORCES

In the practice of concentration, the relation between breath, life force, mind, and vital fluid (sex energy) should be known even by the spiritual beginner. A balanced control of these four bodily forces brings quick spiritual results without any downfall or hindrance. In fact, every spiritual student can attain a concentrated mind just by the single, separate control of any one of the four bodily factors. For example, by strict celibacy alone, one can gain great mental concentration.

However, the balanced way to Self-realization consists in practicing exercises and principles that simultaneously control and harmonize breath, life force, mind, and vital power. Therefore, every spiritual aspirant should practice certain breathing exercises, special techniques controlling energy flowing in the sensory motor nerves, methods of mental meditation, and principles of calmness-producing celibacy (or for those who are married, sexual moderation). Students who meditate regularly without striving to calm the restless breath or control the life force and vital essence, often find insurmountable difficulties on the spiritual path.

If one's life force is restless, he is nervous and keeps his body in constant motion; then his mind is restless, vitality is restless, and breath is restless. But if one controls the life force by spiritual exercises and the practice of calmness through meditation, then his mind and vital power are within his control.

If the breath is restless, as in running, then the life force, mind, and vital essence will be restless. On the other hand, if breath is made calm and rhythmic by the practice of these Lessons, the life force, mind, and sexual instincts will be under control. Again, if the mind is restless, the life force through nervousness and physical desire becomes restless. Mental calmness is usually attended by calm nerves, controlled bodily energy, and a well-regulated moral life. Loss of vitality--resulting from living too much on the physical plane--produces mental dissatisfaction, melancholia, peevishness, nervousness, and heavy restless breath.

By proper breathing exercises and by attaining control of breath, one can achieve a state of deep concentration. By control of the life force in the sensory motor nerves--pranayama, as taught in the higher Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons--one can withdraw the currents from the senses and prevent disturbing sensations from reaching the brain, thus calming the mind. By mental concentration and self-control, as in meditation, one finds the breath and the life force automatically calmed, and thus stability is attained.

The real spiritual teacher knows that the safest, quickest, and best spiritual method for the beginner lies in learning harmonization of these four bodily factors. Some people perform breathing exercises without realizing their spiritual significance. They may grow into good athletes with plenty of lung power, but that is all. Others try to approach God by controlling the life force in the body; but, forgetting the divine conception of the astral technique--pranayama--they satisfy themselves with certain mental and astral powers and forget God entirely. Some try to know God by mind-bound meditation, by imagination only. They see false visions for the most part, and are impressed by subconsciously produced hallucinations, frozen images of their own imagination.

Thus development along any one of these lines alone is limited, one-sided, and often fraught with difficulties. Balanced, harmonious development of control of breath, life energy, mind, and sex instinct brings fastest success and real advancement to the spiritual aspirant.

THOUGHTS TO LIVE BY

Concentration consists of the art of focusing one hundred percent attention upon one thing at a time. All efficient people possess some power of concentration as a by-product of the vocation or avocation that they follow. People can reason without knowing logic, but its study makes them reason better. Similarly, though they naturally possess some

power of concentration, they can greatly improve it by conscious knowledge of the art of concentration.

GURU NANAK

The life of the great divine reformer, Saint Nanak, was like a soothing dew of heaven manifesting on earth to quench mankind's thirst for knowledge. In certain respects Hindus and Muslims have different religious customs and beliefs, yet they were soulfully treated alike by this great Saint Nanak, and they flocked around his banner. No spiritual victrola or overtalkative reformer would ever have succeeded. But Guru Nanak lived the life of truth; piety and virtue were personified in his actions. He gave both the Hindus and the Muslims a chance to behold in manifestation the comforting universalities underlying the two religions. Guru Nanak, by his magnetic power of love and his exemplary conduct, dispelled the blind beliefs of his heterogeneous followers and showed them how to establish in their hearts a sense of the Oneness and Omnipresence of God and the spirit of universal brotherhood.

One day during the service hour in the Islamic mosque, instead of bowing down in front of the altar, Guru Nanak lay down with his feet toward the altar and his head away from it, and feigned sleep. Certain Muslims who were accustomed to demonstrative external modes of worship instead of inner concentration upon God beheld through the corners of their squinted eyes the audacity of this strange man, Nanak, who lay down instead of sitting; who slept instead of praying; and who, above all, was sacrilegious enough to put his feet, instead of his head, toward the altar.

One of the orthodox coterie upbraided him: "You audacious sinner, take your feet away from the altar of God. If you don't, your feet will rot."

Calmly, Saint Nanak replied: "Pray tell me, which way shall I put my feet that there is no altar of God's presence? I behold Him north, south, east, and west, above, beneath, within, and without, and all around me. If you could show me a place where God is not, I would be only too glad to shift my feet to that place. Your outwardly praying minds are roaming over the hills of restlessness. Correct your indifference to God. Your heads are toward the altar, but your souls and minds are away from God. I am glad that even my feet are in the all-protecting, all-guiding power of God."

Unable to reply to the Master's admonitions, the orthodox leader became even more wrathful. He took hold of the feet of Guru Nanak and forcibly turned them away from the altar. But behold! a miracle occurred. With the turning of Nanak's feet from the east to the west, the altar and the whole temple wall moved accordingly.

When this happened, the priest's followers demanded that their leader be humble and recognize the great power of this God-knowing man.

The whole company of them lay prostrate at the feet of the Master Nanak. Then the saint blessed them and said:

"Ye children of my Omnipresent Father, realize the presence of God within yourself first, on the best altar--your heart. And if you find Him there, through that inner window you will soon see God nesting in Omnipresence. To localize God at one point is to imprison Him in walls of finitude. Those who confine God within the limiting walls of their own imagination never find Him. Those who break the walls of sense experience with the hammers of all-dissolving intuitive silence, find God spread out in uncaged space, everywhere.

"Just as confined water rushes out in all directions when the walls holding it are broken, so also when the embankments of bigotry and restlessness are broken, the consciousness of man spreads out and expands into the omnipresent consciousness of Spirit."

INSPIRATION

Little soul-bird-of-paradise, get out of the body cage, with its cage bars of sensation. It is an optical illusion. Forget your little cage to which you are so attached. Behold your vast kingdom of Light and Bliss hidden behind the shade of darkness that now shrouds your spiritual eye, even when you have closed your physical eyes. Daily seeing the material sunlight, you are blinded and unable to behold the magic world of eternally spread luminous electrons shining behind the darkness of closed eyes. Listening to the little vibrations of earth sounds, you have forgotten how to float in the ocean of Cosmic Sound.

AFFIRMATION

I will find Thy presence on the altar
of my constant peace, and in the joy that
springs from deep meditation.

Self-Realization Fellowship Lesson

"Thy Self-realization will blossom forth from thy soulful study"



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COSMIC CREATION

By Paramahansa Yogananda

When the sparks of cosmic creation flew from Thy bosom of flame, I sang in the chorus of singing lights which heralded the coming of the worlds. I am a spark of Thy cosmic fire. Thou Sun of Life, as Thou didst peep into the mortal cups of mind, filled with molten liquid of vital sparks, Thou wert caught within the golden smallness of human feelings.

In each fragile, oscillating mirror of flesh, I see the restless dance of Thine omnipresent power. In the quivering lake of life, I behold Thine almighty life.

Let me calm, by the Christlike command of concentration, the storms of restless desires raging over the limpid lake of my mind. In the still lake of my soul, I love to behold Thine unruffled face of stillness. Break the boundaries of the little wave of my life, that Thy vastness may spread over me.

Make me feel that my heart is throbbing in Thy breast, and that Thou art walking through my feet, breathing through my breath, wielding my arms of activity, and weaving thoughts in my brain. Thy sleeping sighs wake when my sighs cry. Through Thy playfulness, the bubbles of Thy visions of creation float in the chamber of my delusive sleep.

It is Thy meteoric will that courses through the skies of my will. Make me feel that it is Thou who has become I. Oh, make me Thyself, that I may behold the little bubble of me, floating in Thee!

PRAYER

Teach me, O Spirit, by meditation, to stop the storm of breath, mental restlessness, and sensory disturbances raging in the lake of my mind.

POPULAR CONCEPTIONS OF CONCENTRATION

There are two kinds of concentration. One kind develops more or less by indirection, when a person tries to get his mind off a certain thing. The more he tries not to think about it, the more concentrated on it his thought becomes. This is not real concentration, as it is not under the control of the will. Scientific concentration, on the other hand, enables you to throw your attention at will on the object of concentration and to hold it there uninterruptedly for as long as you wish. Self-Realization Fellowship teaches you a scientific method of doing this.

SOME ARE SUCCESSFUL "Well," you may say, "many people do succeed in concentrating on each problem as it arises. They know how to keep their minds on the subject at hand and shut out all extraneous thoughts, even though they were never taught to concentrate, and have never seen Self-Realization Fellowship instructions." This is true; all successful people have good powers of concentration.

Then why should such people bother with any "method" of concentration? Because successful people have developed this power of concentration in the past, or in this life, by constant friction with difficult problems. By utilizing their previously acquired ability scientifically, they can increase their successes. For instance, one can reason without learning logic, but the clear-thinking man who adds logic to his mental tool kit has an advantage over the one who knows nothing of the laws pertaining to forms of reasonings.

The ordinary successful businessman uses only about twenty-five percent of his powers of concentration, but the student of Self-Realization Fellowship can develop his power of concentration to one hundred percent usefulness and exert it scientifically. In addition--and this is most important--he will be led into the art of meditation and learn to balance material success with spiritual success.

By the practice of meditation man learns how to throw his thought concentratedly upon God and to appeal successfully to Him to recharge his concentration with God's perfect concentration. Only then--when scientifically acquired human concentration is charged with the concentration of Spirit--can man expect to accomplish all things. That kind of concentration is required in order to demonstrate successfully a command such as: "O ye mountains, go into the depths of the sea!"

THE RIGHT METHOD OF CONCENTRATION

The Self-Realization Technique of Concentration is uniquely scientific, because it teaches students how to reinforce the power of the human mind with the supercharged, concentrated consciousness of God. Everyone can benefit from application of the scientific Self-Realization method of God-directed, God-charged concentration: the busy housewife; the worry-burdened businessman; the restless-minded type whose uncontrolled thoughts make him go like a jumping jack; the devout churchman who is seeking greater knowledge; and the real spiritual aspirant--the yogi.

Through the voice of silence and peace God tries to speak to all His children in response to their prayers. But His voice is usually drowned out by rowdy sensations of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight, and by the tumult of sensation- and memory-roused thoughts. Finding the devotee's attention entangled in restlessness and engrossed with the incoming "calls" at the switchboard of sensation, God's voice recedes into the depths of silence.

God sadly turns away whenever He finds that His temple of concentration has been made a noisy place for the money-changers of material desires and sensations. The Christlike guru-preceptor (intuition) must come with the whip of self-control to drive away the materially busy, restless thoughts, and make the temple of silence into a temple of God.

Inequalities in the power of concentration exhibited by various people are reflected in the differing degrees of success they achieve. Self-Realization Fellowship teaches that by powerful concentration the businessman can increase his success; the focused power of detached attention may similarly be applied to making a greater success of a home, an art, a profession, a church, or in establishing a temple of silence in the soul. It is wrong, of course, to use high-powered concentration for self-success at the expense of others; one must know how to guide and reinforce concentration with the just, unselfish, service-giving, sympathetic, superconcentration of God.

Some persons who apply great concentration to become rich are satisfied to use their high-powered minds for gaining material success, while turning a deaf ear to cries of misery from others. But the man charged with the superconcentration of God wants success only when others may benefit at the same time. He tries to spiritualize the ideal of industry through service, and finds happiness through making others happy. Self-Realization Fellowship teaches the art of idealistic concentration for the good of self and all others.

THOUGHTS TO REMEMBER

Always reflect your balanced attitude toward others. A calm person has his senses fully identified with the environment in which he places himself. A restless person does not notice anything, consequently he

gets into trouble with himself and others and misunderstands everything. A calm person, by the virtue of his self-possession, is always at peace with others, always happy, always calm. Never change the center of your concentration from calmness to restlessness. Perform activities only with concentration.

Many persons think that their actions have to be either restless or slow. That is not true. If you keep calm, with intense concentration, you will perform all duties with the correct speed. The art of true action is to be able to act slowly or speedily without losing your inner peace. The proper method is to establish a controlled attitude, wherein you can work with peace without losing your balance.

This does not mean that you should be calm for a while and then let your mind run riot. It is not the person who meditates a long time for one day and then does not meditate again for several days who becomes successful on the spiritual path. The person who meditates and always holds to the aftereffects of meditation throughout the day is the one who quickly approaches to Godliness and Cosmic Consciousness. There are thousands of persons who are material. Their movements are of materiality. They are matter in motion. Do not be like them. Cultivate inner calmness and poise.

MADAME BUTTERFLY'S ATTEMPTS AT CONCENTRATION

Paramahansa Yogananda often told this story to illustrate what happens when a person with untrained mind sits down to concentrate. He called the principal of his story Madame Butterfly--though male students just as often have such experiences in their unrewarding efforts at concentration.

The scene is Madame Butterfly's living room. The time, the middle of a cold winter afternoon. Since all the housework is done, and it's too dismal to go anyplace, our friend has some of that "spare time" she's always looking for in order to practice concentration.

She sits down in a straight-backed chair. No sooner has her body touched the chair than she exclaims. "This seat is too hard! I should have a pillow." She finds one the right size and sinks down upon it. Then Madame Butterfly discovers that the chair squeaks. Transferring pillow and body to another chair she notices a draft, and closes the window. Next she develops a tendency to sneeze. But her handkerchief had dropped near the first chair. Her handkerchief reclaimed, Madame contentedly thinks, "Now for a delightful dip into the depths of concentration."

A few moments pass, and her mind is just beginning to settle when the boiling radiator begins to bubble. In disgust, she jumps up and roughly chokes the radiator's voice.

Once more she settles herself, righteous indignation increasing the determination to dive deep into meditation. Then, in the apartment next

door, someone starts to play the piano, accompanied by laughter and loud talking.

Now Madame Butterfly is both mad and disgusted. She considers pounding on the wall, but after all, it is the middle of the afternoon, and so the neighbors have a right to play if they wish. She begins to listen and to think: "That's really a good piano." Our friend then recalls other pianos she has heard. She remembers the pleasant days when she was a child and used to dance while her dear old grandmother played rustic airs popular in her own youth. She thinks of some of her grandmother's escapades as an attractive young belle.

And so on and on, until suddenly Madame Butterfly remembers her original purpose of concentration and jerks herself from her sweet reveries. She tries to assume the saintly dignity of a veteran yogi, rebuking her body and mind for their restlessness.

She makes a desperate effort to regather the battered fragments of her self-control. Her eyes have hardly closed again when the telephone crows out with impudent, patience-piercing pertinacity. "I will not answer it!" But the impertinent bell continues. Madame Butterfly begins to doubt her wisdom. "It might be an important call," she thinks. So she gets up and answers the phone only to find that someone has dialed the wrong number.

This ordeal over, she musters up enough courage to begin again. But now her head begins to nod. Her sense of shame at this is shoved aside by self-pity for her exhausted condition. But forcing herself to sit straight, Madame tries again.

This effort is diverted by the clamorous ringing of the hoarse-voiced doorbell. She remains still for a few moments, but the patience-breaking jangle goes on until she begins to think again, "It must be something important." Once at the door, however, Madame Butterfly assumes a galvanized smile as she greets three feminine acquaintances, all of whom have a master's degree in the art of gossiping. Behind the artificial flower of her forced smile our friend hides the stinging wasp of petulance, as she thinks: "Oh you pests, why couldn't you have stayed away and let me concentrate?"

Happily oblivious to this, the three visitors enter and busy themselves raking and prodding in everyone else's dirt heaps--secure in the knowledge that for the moment there is a "keep off" sign on their own. Madame Butterfly laughs pleasantly, and three hours slip away before she has the relief of closing the door behind these inordinate gossips.

Automatically she resumes her attempts at concentration. But now her attention is mobbed by memories of leaky radiators, piano-pounding, telephone bells, raucous doorbells, and gossipy tidbits. Guiltily she halts this mental resume. "What time is it anyway?" Madame looks at her watch, and with a resigned sigh, rises and starts to the kitchen to get supper.

The living room is empty again. And it might just as well have remained so all afternoon, as far as Madame Butterfly's efforts at concentration are concerned.

The above experience is not an exaggeration. It is only a sample of what happens to most people when they attempt to concentrate.

INSPIRATION

It is good to remember the following: seek intensely until you find God. Knock until the doors of all wisdom are opened unto you. Believe and act according to your faith, until you know. Pray until He answers. Meditate deeper and deeper, until you find and feel Him as unending joy. Love Him until you feel His love. Talk to Him continuously in silence until He speaks to you. Remember, the so-called certainties of life--such as money, fame, and friends--are really the most difficult to retain. They may slip away any minute. So, make the imperishable so-called unknown, uncertain God your own; you will find Him most faithful, when all else leaves you beyond the last gate of this life.

AFFIRMATION

I will open the only gate, the gate of meditation, that leads to Thy blessed presence.

Self-Realization Fellowship Lesson

"Thy Self-realization will blossom forth from thy soulful study"



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WHERE I FOUND THEE

By Paramahansa Yogananda

I bow to Thee in silver rays;
I drink to Thee in sunbeams;
I stand in reverence before Thy mountain majesty;
I clasp Thine image reflected in the lake;
In the voice of the echo I hear Thy voice;
I embrace Thee in the calm caress of the breeze;
I bathe in Thy bubbling fountain of my bosom.
The explosions of my passions have died away
And I hear Thy whispers in the pines and in the
Gentle swish of the laughing waters of the lake.

I listened to Thy sermons through the voice
Of my reason.
I beheld Thee plowing the soil
Of my soul with trials,
And sowing the seeds of Thy wisdom therein.
Every day I watered the seeds sown by Thee,
But it was only when the sunshine
Of Thy mercy came
That those seeds sprouted, grew, and
Yielded the harvest of contentment.

Suddenly the waters, nature's green carpets,
The blue vastness overhead, the opaque stones,
And my body, became transformed into a vast mirror
By the magic touch of my silence,
And I saw myself reflected in everything.
And when in concentration I looked at myself,
I became transparent--and in my transparency
I could not find me--but only Thee, only Thee.

PRAYER

Divine Mother, let the magic wand of my intuition stop the gale of passions and unnecessary desires, and in the rippleless lake of my mind, let me behold the undistorted reflection of the moon of my soul, glistening with the light of Thy presence.

DEFINITIONS OF CONCENTRATION

The great Hindu sage, Patanjali, said that union with God is established by neutralizing the restless thought- and desire-waves of the consciousness. To illustrate: the image of the moon looks distorted if it is reflected in the waters of a lake whose surface is rippled by the wind; but if the wind subsides, the ripples vanish and the clear, undistorted, reflected perfection of the moon is seen. God is reflected as soul in the lakes of consciousness in myriads of human beings--just as the one moon may be reflected in a million lakes. But because the lakes of human attention are rippling with sensations and thoughts caused by the storms of breath and of mental restlessness, the soul-image of God reflected there is distorted.

When the Self-Realization Fellowship technique of concentration is successfully practiced, the waves of breath cease, owing to the restfulness of the heart; then the ripples of sensations and of restless thoughts vanish from the lake of attention, and the undisturbed reflection of the soul is seen. Patanjali emphasizes the negative side of concentration: that as soon as the attention is free from the objects of distraction, it can reveal the soul, just as the removal of the hand from in front of the lens of a flashlight reveals the things in front of it in the dark.

Jesus said: "If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out" (Matthew 18:8,9).

In these words are hidden a Biblical definition of concentration. Jesus meant that every devotee must know how to concentrate and do away with all distractions of sensations such as touch ("thy hand") and sight("thine eye"). The devotee must know how to calm the senses, i.e., take consciousness away from them, and how to withdraw the life force from the sensory-motor nerves, which are the conductors of disturbing sensations. Thus he will know how to enter the eternal life, the ever-conscious, ever-existing, ever-new bliss of the soul. The life force in the nerves keeps the soul entangled with messages of sensations from the eyes, ears, hands, and so forth; but when the life force is plucked from the eyes and cut off from the hands, and from all consciousness of the body, the soul's attention becomes freed from the distracting messages of the senses. Then the soul becomes cognizant of its divine nature. Only then is a state of complete concentration reached.

The following is a psychologically sound and scientific definition of concentration:

Concentration is that power which one can apply negatively to free the attention from objects of distraction, and positively to place the attention on a single idea or object at a time.

When the attention is freed from minor distractions, it may be directed to act positively by focusing its rays on any kind of problem, or upon God. It is all right to say that a person is concentrating on how to make more money in business, or that he is concentrating on God; but you should not say, "He is meditating on his business problems." For real meditation, as taught to Self-Realization students, is that specific form of concentration which is applied only to knowing God.

Many students try ineffectually to meditate, to think about God, but they are still hypnotized by restlessness and cannot forget their surroundings. In order to get results, one must learn how to detach his attention from distracting thoughts and sensations and apply it to God. No meditation is possible without knowing the art of concentration. Prayer, chanting, and singing all become a mockery without application of the positive and negative factors of concentration and meditation.

All people need to know the art of concentration in order to gain real success, each in his own respective path. No one can concentrate deeply upon God, art, business--or anything else--without first disengaging his attention from outer and inner distraction. Hence a scientific technique of freeing one's attention from the objects of distraction is the only way to get results. How hopeless it is for either the house-keeper, the businessman, or the spiritual aspirant to try to concentrate by employing the popular way of mental diversion! The student who wishes to learn real concentration should begin by learning two things:

- 1) What the objects of distraction are.
- 2) How the attention can be scientifically switched off from them.

Many men and women believe that prayer takes the place of concentration. This is true only when the laws of prayer are followed. Most people who try to contact God do so unscientifically, and hence ineffectively, either by blind devotion or by intellectual investigation. Of course, if the prayer is intense, the attention automatically disengages itself from objects of distraction and focuses itself upon God; then one has true concentration. But the program of worship in most cases consists in a variety of physical ceremonies, such as singing hymns and listening to sermons; the attention has no opportunity to go deep into God-consciousness.

The Heavenly Father does not reveal Himself to those who are intellectually wise but without devotion; nor to the emotionally intoxicated, who are unable to reason clearly; but unto those who worship Him "as little children," wholeheartedly and with full attention:

"To those blessed ones who worship Me,
Turning not otherwhere, with minds set fast,
I bring assurance of full Bliss beyond."

--Bhagavad Gita

God will come into all churches and temples if He finds the heart doors of the devotees within open to Him, and if genuine soul-inspired concentration or meditation gives Him a welcome. God can never be bribed by the size of a church congregation, nor by its wealth, nor by well-planned sermons. God visits only the altars of hearts that are cleansed by tears of devotion and lighted by soul-stirring love.

FOUR STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The first state of consciousness is marked by complete identification of the self and its well-being with the struggle for and acquirement of material and physical satisfactions. Such a person does not try to understand the power behind his brain, without which no gainful or pleasurable activity can be carried on.

The second state is reached when a person, by occasional concentration on higher things, tries once in a while to get away from his preoccupation with the sensory world.

The third state is reached by deeper concentration; the yogi arrives at a middle point wherein he enjoys glimpses of inner Bliss; his spiritual and material tendencies are now evenly matched, as a result of steady effort at concentration and of proper schooling in the habits of silent concentration.

The fourth state comes when the consciousness becomes completely identified with the only good or God, and the yogi goes beyond the oppositional states of good and evil. Awakening in God, the yogi finds that the dual states of good and evil have vanished, just as sorrowful or joyous dream experiences of disease and health, bereavement and fulfillment, vanish upon one's awakening from sleep.

PORTRAIT OF AN UNSUCCESSFUL BUSINESSMAN

He gulps down an inadequate breakfast, hurries to his office, and sits at a desk littered with papers that mutely shriek "unfinished business." He picks up one or two letters and glances at them, but before his mind has formulated any replies he glimpses the appointment pad on his desk and realizes that he must decide on a course of procedure before he talks with Mr. Blank.

He tries to concentrate on this problem. However, his mind keeps reverting to the letters just put aside, and wants to mull over those problems instead. The din of his secretary's typewriter annoys him. He shouts at her to stop. A moment later, he realizes that she's typing on

a rush assignment he gave her, so he shouts at her to go on again.

To calm himself, he begins smoking his after-breakfast cigar. This brings to mind another problem: he tells himself that he should be firm in his determination to quit smoking. Ragged nerves tug at the sleeve of his conscience, and finally he dashes the cigar into an ashtray.

At this inopportune moment the secretary brings over a pile of letters to be signed. The boss, unreasonably upset at the intrusion, angrily banishes her to the outer office. He tries to concentrate on his problem once more, but the pieces won't go together. His ineffectual struggle makes him sleepy and he dozes off in disgust at his inability to work out a solution.

This is his first comfortable moment, so he quietly drifts into deeper slumber. His secretary returns, jolting him back to consciousness just in time for his important appointment with Mr. Blank. But inasmuch as he has failed to map out a plan, he talks haphazardly all around the subject, gives the impression that he is only an ineffectual bluffer, and the deal he had hoped for falls through.

AFFIRMATION

I shall seek to know Thee first, last,
and all the time. Finding Thee first, I shall
find, in Thee, all things that I craved.

Self-Realization Fellowship Lesson

"Thy Self-realization will blossom forth from thy soulful study"



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THY STATION, JOY

By Paramahansa Yogananda

From Thy station, JOY, I hear daily Thine
ineffable shrill-soft tones, dear and familiar.

At first I tried to tune Thee in from so
far, far away; Thy program seemed beyond the re-
ception of the tiny instrument of my mind. But
after I had made many fine touches on the dial
of meditation, Thou didst come in on sudden
etheric wings.

Thou wert singing a melody of earth's goodness
and the nobility in all hearts.

--From "Whispers from Eternity"

PRAYER

O Spirit, teach me to pray with deep concentration, and to imbue scientific meditation with devotion. May my heart daily become more pure by all-surrendering love for Thee.

THE ART OF CONCENTRATION

DISTRACTIONS
THAT INVADE
SILENCE

People are eagerly seeking success or health; but even if they gain it, they are restless just the same. The soul's hunger cannot be satisfied by material substitutes nor by theological chaff. Some modern religious movements are adopting "going into the silence" in their program of Sunday worship. But "going into the silence," though it brings some peace, does not teach the groping spiritual aspirant how to commune with God. "Going into the silence," by diverting and silencing thoughts, is only a negative factor of concentration and a slow method of establishing God-contact.

The difference between spoken prayer and silence is considerable: In audible prayer the mind is busy with sounds and bodily motions, as well as with restless thoughts. In ordinary silence, the mind is kept partially quieted by keeping the body still, and the optic telephone is cut off by the closing of the eyes. But the thoughts within may still run wild. Some people succeed in silencing their thoughts for a moment or two, and get a little glimpse of the peaceful face of God through this temporary crack in the wall of restlessness. But often a real seeker is confronted by darkness, with only an occasional glimpse of peace, which is soon broken by the disturbance of restless thoughts. He begins to wonder, "Is this all there is to God and His inspiration?"

When he opens his eyes and gets out of this state of negative silence, at first he is filled with a new sense of wonder at the glory and immensity of sunlight; at the mysterious power of electricity that causes the trolley cars to run hither and yon; at the marvel of skyscrapers; at the lightning searing the sky; at the powerful light of the moon. But as he experiences only a little occasional peace in the silence, he gradually finds less and less consolation in the powers and manifestations of nature. Soon he begins to belittle his strivings for more spirituality and his inner experiences during periods of silence.

The Cosmic Light, or Cosmic Energy, the Creator of all forces, hides behind the darkness at first perceived in silence; but those who are in the darkness of negative silence do not comprehend that. In these Self-Realization Fellowship studies you will learn how to produce scientifically a positive state of meditative silence, and thus quiet all thoughts and sensations. There are higher states of concentration, and as the devotee ascends to them, one by one, he comes into higher and higher spheres of indescribable joys and uplifting experiences and

visions. He blissfully realizes: "He whom I was seeking in the cloud-forests of the blue is here with me, within me. I sought Him as a Power without, only to find that He--the fountain of all nature's forces--exists within me. In the silence, just behind the walls of darkness, I adoringly perceive Him."

To perceive God, one must first learn the positive and negative factors of silence. It is necessary to analyze the definite psychophysical elements of distraction that invade silence as one's attention tries to march toward its mental objective.

SENSATIONS For example, as soon as you sit to concentrate upon your business in the office, your attention is busy with the noise of typewriters and other office equipment, or with the roar of streetcars and automobiles in the street outside, intruding on your consciousness through the auditory nerve wires. Touch sensations of comfort (pleasurable feelings of the flesh such as after-dinner satisfaction, or abundant vitality, and so forth) or of discomfort (disagreeable feelings such as itches, aches, binding of tight clothing, perspiration, heat, cold, hunger, and weariness) pour into the brain through the tactal nerve wires. Or your attention may become preoccupied with the body odors of nearby persons, or with the fragrance of flowers in the room, or the perfume used by someone near you--sensations that keep crowding into your brain through your olfactory nerve wires.

Or your attention may be busy with visual sensations being reported to your brain through your optic nerve telephones: the sight of your office furnishings, or others' apparel. Your attention may be busy with pleasant or unpleasant sensations of the palate: the taste of peppermint candy, or chewing gum, or an after-smoking taste, or the after-sensation of the taste of cold water that you may have drunk not long before. So you see that all the while your attention wants to concentrate upon a problem, upon business, or upon God, it meets with many distractions caused by sensations of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell.

THOUGHTS EVOKED BY SENSATIONS But the five kinds of distractions just enumerated are not the only claims upon your attention. These sensations give rise to thoughts that lure the attention away from its pursuit of concentration. For instance, when you hear a noisy automobile outside the room in which you are trying to concentrate, you perhaps begin to have thoughts about different makes of cars; or the chewing-gum taste in your mouth may make you think about the many flavors of chewing gum. The fragrance of flowers in the room may make you think of the florist's shop, or your grandmother's delightful garden. The sight of your business office may make you think of grander offices you have been in; and seeing the apparel of the people around, you may think of various kinds of clothes you would like to own.

**PAST THOUGHTS
ROUSED BY
PRESENT THOUGHTS**

Thus sensations give rise to thoughts. Fresh thoughts arising from sensations may then rouse related thoughts in your subconscious memory. For instance, the sound of automobiles around

your place may not only rouse many thoughts about other models of automobiles, but these, in their turn, may rouse in your consciousness latent thoughts of how you have driven many models of cars, or remind you of a bad accident you had with a certain powerful car. So your attention generally meets first with sensations, then with crowds of new thoughts, and finally with memory thoughts waking from their subconscious slumber.

Distractions--the enemies of attention--are threefold:

1. sensations;
2. new thoughts roused by sensations;
3. old memory thoughts roused by present thoughts.

The minute your attention wishes to march along the pathway of concentration toward a definite goal, it is waylaid by these invisible bandits of distraction.

POPULAR WAY OF
CONCENTRATION
IS DIVERSION

If you should ask how you can succeed when trying to concentrate upon a problem or upon a Sunday sermon, most persons would tell you to divert your mind from the objects of distraction. But this seldom works successfully; for whenever you try hard not to think about a particular thing, your mind perversely dwells on it.

It is almost futile, for example, to try to divert your mind from a constantly ringing telephone bell when you are trying to concentrate. This is because, when the bell rings, the report of the sound is carried to the brain by the life force in the auditory nerves. Whether you wish to hear it or not, the bell sound penetrating through your auditory nerves is bound to register in the brain.

Trying to divert the attention from the disturbing sound of a bell by thinking of something else during the attempt at concentration is unscientific. However, a man of habitually intense concentration habits may be able to turn his mind deeply enough within so as not to hear the ringing. The question then arises: What physiological changes occur in this man to permit such deep concentration that he really does not hear the sound of the telephone bell, although its vibration strikes the tympanum of his ear?

The logical conclusion is that there is an inseparable relationship between intelligence (the "operator" of the sense-telephone switchboard in the brain) and the life force flowing in the auditory nerve telephones. When the operator (intelligence) chooses, he can, by diversion or by scientific relaxation (as taught in these studies), shut out the sound of the telephone bell so that it will not disturb him. A real telephone operator working at a switchboard can do several things to be free from the disturbance of a ringing bell:

1. She may be so busy mentally doing something else that she does not listen to the telephonic sound, though it rings in her brain, transmitted through her auditory nerve wires. Thus by

diversion her attention remains unaware of the sound.

2. She can fall asleep before the switchboard; then she will not hear the sound of the bell signaling the message coming through the wires.
3. She may simply switch off the current from the wires and thus prevent their transmitting the electrical impulse that sounds the bell.

Similarly, any person may do several things to prevent hearing the sound of a telephone bell:

1. By diversion one can disengage the attention of the intelligence that takes note of the switchboard signal of his auditory sense telephone. By this method, however, he does not remove the real cause through which the disturbing sound of the bell reaches his brain.
2. By sleep, or "unconscious" sensory-muscular relaxation, one can prevent the entry of the bell sound into the brain. In the subconscious state of sleep, the life force is relaxed from the muscles and from the five sense-telephone wires of touch, smell, taste, sight, and hearing.
3. One can scientifically switch off the thoughts and the life force from the senses. An explanation of the scientific method of doing this will follow in Lesson 20, and a special technique of concentration--Hong-Sau--will be given in Lesson 21.

THOUGHTS TO LIVE BY

The great spiritual teachers of India realized the necessity of discovering psychophysical methods of concentration. Concentration is an extremely important factor in achieving success on any plane. A great businessman or a big social or spiritual reformer is a man of keen concentration. By the concentrated rays of his attention, developed unconsciously, he burns away and destroys the roots of every difficulty that comes before him, and thereby makes a success of his undertakings. But he could be an even greater success if he knew the art of conscious concentration, which would enable him to focus the burning power of attention upon any difficult problem, just as the sun's rays, concentrated through a magnifying glass, can ignite inflammable objects beneath it.

MONKEY CONSCIOUSNESS

Tej Bahadur, a young businessman in India, had to spend a considerable amount of his hard-earned money to go to London to confirm his business transactions. He greatly desired to cut costs, but no matter

how he cut down his overhead he was never satisfied. He was constantly thinking of schemes for saving money. Though a wealthy businessman, he once even considered the idea of going to London by working his own way as a sailor.

One day when Tej Bahadur was contemplating new ways to practice economy, he fretfully wondered why God had not made him fast moving like electricity, which traverses vast tracts of space in the twinkling of an eye. Just then a friend of his, who knew all about his exaggerated notions of economy, came hurrying toward him and told him excitedly: "Tej Bahadur, come to the banks of the river Ganges. I have found a man who can levitate and walk on water, and who is willing to teach the method to a worthy student."

Impressed, the wealthy Tej Bahadur said to himself: "Thank God for sending me a levitating tutor. I will ask him to teach me how to do it, and that will save me all that money I annually spend on my European business trips."

He wended his way toward the riverbank, where the levitating teacher was temporarily encamped, and asked to be taught the art of levitation.

The master gave Tej Bahadur the following instruction: "Son, every night, dim the light in your bedroom, lock the doors, and, sitting erect on a straight chair facing the east, with closed eyes mentally chant the holy word of the Cosmic Vibration--Om--for an hour. At the end of one month you will be able to race through the air over land or water."

As the businessman, inwardly wondering about the extreme simplicity of the lesson, thanked his teacher and was about to return home, he was called back by the master, who gently cautioned him further: "I forgot to tell you something about the technique of levitation. While you are mentally chanting and concentrating on 'Om,' be sure not to think of a monkey."

"That is simple," said the businessman. "Of course I won't think of a monkey." After saluting the saint, he returned home.

Evening found Tej Bahadur closing the windows, pulling down the shades, and seating himself in a straight chair in his bedroom to practice the technique of levitation. No sooner had he done so than the first thought that struck him was: "I must not think of a monkey!"

Two minutes passed and several times Tej Bahadur warned himself inwardly: "I must not think of a monkey."

By the time ten minutes had passed he had thought of all the different kinds of monkeys in South America, India, Africa, Sumatra, and still other places. Tej Bahadur was furious. He willed himself to banish the thoughts about the monkeys, which were leaping in rapid procession through the window of his helpless mind. At the end of an hour he found himself thinking of nothing but monkeys. With each succeeding day he meditated faithfully, but, to his great annoyance, he found that he was

really only frantically trying not to think of the millions of imaginary monkeys that were jumping into his mind.

After a month's concentration upon the forbidden monkeys, Tej Bahadur raced back to his teacher and exclaimed: "Master, take back your lesson on levitation! You have taught me to meditate upon monkeys instead. Your method has only developed a monkey consciousness in me."

The saint laughed merrily. In a voice as soothing as the dew, he advised his pupil: "Son, I only tried to show you how untrained and slavish is your mental state of concentration. Unless you learn to make your mind obey you, you cannot achieve any material success, not to speak of the difficult art of attaining the power of levitation. First learn to attain mental control; then use that power to achieve small things; and when you are able to do that, try for bigger and bigger achievements, until your inner power becomes developed enough to levitate you, or better by far, to accomplish spiritual miracles in your consciousness."

AFFIRMATION

I will expand the little bubble of my joy. I will keep puffing at it with the breath of my concentration until it spreads all over my face, into my heart, throughout my entire body and mind, and over the Ocean of Infinity that is hidden in my consciousness.

